

Special **WILLIAM F. NOLAN** Issue

Deathrealm

The Land Where Horror Dwells

ISSUE #27

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· D.F. LEWIS · BILLIE SUE MOSIMAN · J.N. WILLIAMSON
· MICHAEL ZIMMERMAN ·



Deathrealm

The Land Where Horror Dwells

ISSUE #27

SPRING, 1996

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Send all orders, letters to the editor, address changes, submissions, and other correspondence (unless it's really nasty) to the address above or to the editor at S.RAINEY@GENIE.COM. Email submissions may be accepted, but query first. Do not send disk copies of manuscripts that have not already been accepted unless you just feel like giving the editor a freebie.

Check out DEATHREALM on the Wide World Web at <http://www.greyware.com/authors/LWE/realm.htm>.

Departments

R.I.P.	
Editorial	2
INSIDE HORROR	
Clippings from the Edge	3
OUT FROM THE SHADOWS	
Letters to the Editor	4
TENTACLES ACROSS THE ATLANTIC	
Column by D.F. Lewis	13
A GRAVEYARD CHAT: Interview with WILLIAM F. NOLAN	
By Gary Braunbeck	18
THE VIEW FROM THE CASTLE TOWER	
By Billie Sue Mosiman	24
DEATH'S DOOR	
Magazine Reviews	34
SILHOUETTES: Interview with DONALD R. BURLESON	
By Scott David Aniolowski	43
FORBIDDEN TEXTS	
Book Reviews	46

Fiction

HIDDEN VOICES	
By Danielle D'Attilio / Illustrated by Wayne Miller	6
TWO FROM THE PACK	
By William F. Nolan / Illustrated by Michael Apice	14
SALIVA, SUNBURN, & THE SCUM OF THE EARTH	
By Michael Zimmerman / Illustrated by Jim Zimmerman	26
JIGSAW	
By Donald R. Burleson	38
ON THE LATE TRAIN THROUGH TEXAS	
By J.N. Williamson	50

Poetry

I AM THEREFORE...	
By Lucas VanCraven	5
THE CRIMSON CAD	
By Scott David Aniolowski	12
I WANT TO BE A VAMPIRE	
By Darrell Schweitzer	12
LILITH/Y'GOLONAC	
By Scott David Aniolowski	33

ROTZ

Scribblings from Ye Editor

BACK AGAIN.... Sometimes an issue of *Deathrealm* happens that says to me, "Yeah, this is what it's all about." The last couple of issues have whispered things like that, and this one especially raises its voice. Due to the sheer volume of words submitted to me by hopeful contributors, I sometimes begin to question my own objectivity; is what I'm picking really a superlative work of fiction, or is it merely a refreshing notch above the deadfall of mediocrity I just hacked through? Happily, as a rule, the former wins out, as witnessed by the very warm reception readers have given the last few issues in particular.

And when I'm fortunate enough to be offered something of the calibre of "Two from the Pack" by William F. Nolan, I really do feel rewarded and honored. Mr. Nolan's track record is an impressive thing, a list of achievements to be inspiring, I think. He could have easily sold this work to a much higher paying, more widely distributed periodical or anthology, but Nolan told me he really enjoys supporting the small presses, especially one he feels has proven itself to be a leader in the field.

High praise indeed.

Author Gary Braunbeck has provided an in-depth, insightful interview with Mr. Nolan, and I hope you'll enjoy both it and "Two from the Pack."

And it doesn't stop there, oh, no. Veteran author J.N. Williamson contributes another example of why his reputation as a master storyteller is well-founded indeed. Jerry is one of the most widely published authors of the darker side of fiction--and an ardent supporter of those of us laboring to bring horror/dark fantasy to a wider audience.

I'd like to encourage more of you to write in with your comments on this and other issues of *Deathrealm*; you can send them snail mail to the regular editorial address or email them to S.Rainey@genie.com. As I've said many times, the best way for me to satisfy your horror cravings is to

know what you've liked; what you want to see; and what you don't like. And don't be bashful--anyone who has followed the letters column here knows I don't just print endless words of praise and/or encouragement. I'm just as happy to see constructive, thoughtful criticism and/or discussion, and I have no problem--if you don't--putting that in front of the readers.

We've got some real goodies coming up in future issues, so I hope you'll stick with us. Lessee, next time we have in-depth interviews with Poppy Z. Brite and F. Paul Wilson, two of the most influential names in the business. Also on the slate is a Graveyard Chat with Clive Barker. Maybe even Harlan will pop in here eventually. Plus, there's lots of fiction to fry your brain, and if you don't like that, there's some geared to give you a chuckle. Look out.



Editors D'Attilio, Rainey and Maestro; for those who may be unsure, Maestro is the very small, impeccably dressed lion. Always one to favor style over comfort, Maestro never takes off his tuxedo.

I've always had my share of people asking why I do *Deathrealm*, but lately, the question has been repeated a lot, I guess because the magazine's been around for going on ten years, has literally died and come back from the grave two times over, and consumes as much a part of my waking life as does my regular day job. Am I a glutton for punishment? Do I really like scaring people? Or am I am in it just for the gorgeous babes?

What do I want for -- and out of -- *Deathrealm*?

Well, I guess to address that last question: in both the stories I pick for *Deathrealm* and in my own writing, I think the thing I enjoy most is the exploration of the unknown, whether it be the darkness "out

there" or that which lurks deep within ourselves. I'm not talking about tales where psycho-killer-murders-helpless-victim(s)-gets-just-come-uppance; I see at least one of these every single day I read submissions, and frankly, I'm at my wit's end with them (see *Deathrealm*'s writers guidelines regarding "Bilge" stories for more details). I'm not talking about "Oh-my-God-I've-seen-the-monster-and-the-monster-is-me!" stories. Puh-leeze. We're all full of darkness; we live with it every day; it's in us and it's around us. Bombarding us. Hammering us. Desensitizing us. Boiling in us. A character's revelation that he might after all be just as full of darkness as his evil neighbor is like saying the Pope wears a funny hat.

Some writers make peace with the darkness and use it as a tool.

Some fight it tooth and nail and record the results in their fiction with passionate energy.

Some remove themselves from it and look beyond, to that which can only be imagined, to those unknowns that might be so big, so dark, that the greatest conceivable human evil is pure whimsy.

Some bring out the very best in humankind by spotlighting the worst.

Some writers do all of the above; not at the same time, but in their collective body of work. Some of them have been around a long time, and you know their writing intimately. Others are just breaking in and finding their niche.

The stories they tell strike chords in us, as readers. They look beyond plain formula, beyond stereotyped characters, beyond hackneyed plots; and they work at their art; hone their craft. They move us.

They're hard to find, because I think to be able to accomplish these things takes something special indeed. Everybody and his brother is writing a story, but how many of them are able to sit you down, make you turn the pages and keep reading on and on because you care what happens to those people and places that come alive with their words?

Those writers you find in these pages are the ones that I think succeed. Obviously, not every story is going to touch everyone the same way, sometimes not at all. But what you read in *Deathrealm* represents a collective vision of many writers, focused through a single editorial eye.

I reckon that's why I do it.

And for the gorgeous babes.

Till next time.

Stephen Mark Rainey

--Stephen Mark Rainey



Inside Horror



newsletters can barely achieve in a month. It's rare indeed to show up online on Thursday and *not* find the newsletter waiting in the box; in fact, if Ms. Guran is unable to deliver as promised on Thursday, more likely than not, the newsletter will be there on Wednesday--the day before.

Horror/Dark Fantasy Online

EVERY THURSDAY, HUNDREDS of online writers, readers and fans of horror/dark fantasy receive in their email boxes a weekly newsletter of goings-on in the business. Interviews, reviews, market reports, trivia contests, current events, personal achievements...you name it, you find it here.

The guilty party behind the Dark Fantasy Fiction Newsletter is HWA member **Paula Guran**, who compiles the entire report and sends it out to "subscribers" via the Internet. Paula herself resides on America Online and runs a weekly online dark fantasy workshop, which often features well-known "names" in the business as well as editors, artists and other pros who currently shape the face of the dark fiction market.

Paula is a fastidious editor, compiling literally hundreds of individual bits of information, presenting on a weekly basis what lots of other "published"

The Death of Horror

JOHN GREGORY BETANCOURT, owner of Wildside Press, has announced that *Horror*, the news magazine of the horror industry, is officially cancelled. Citing the bankruptcy of Inland Book Distributors, and personal writing commitments as the primary reasons, Betancourt has decided to scale back all of Wildside's publishing operations and concentrate on writing and book packaging.

Betancourt will be contacting subscribers to arrange refunds for unmailed issues.

Horror, however, is not completely dead. A scaled-down electronic edition will be featured at Wildside's WWW site. Those who have stopped by recently may have noticed that bits and pieces from *Horror* are already appearing, such as news stories and book reviews. Although it won't ever be as big as the print version (and, in fact, will be called *Wildside* rather than *Horror*),

Betancourt hopes you will all stopby to check out what's new and interesting in the field.

Wildside expects to release 8-12 CD-ROM disks this year in conjunction with the Judson Rosebush Company, and perhaps as many as 8 packaged projects with various publishing companies, including Dell, Barnes & Noble, Penguin USA, the Doubleday Book Club, and Warner Aspect. Upcoming projects include a new novella by Tanith Lee called *Louisa the Poisoner*, an anthology of mainstream plays edited by Marvin Kaye, a volume entitled *The Best of Weird Tales: 1923*, and collections by Mike Resnick and William F. Nolan.

Wildside's internet address is: <http://www.openix.com/~wildside>

Editor's Note: Late-breaking news reports that Joe Morey of Dark Regions Press will be picking Horror and continue to run it in magazine format. More on this next time if details are made available.

Deathrealm Awards to be Presented at World Horror Con

THE 7th ANNUAL World Horror Convention will be held in Eugene, Oregon, on the weekend of May 10-12, 1996, at the Valley River Inn Hotel. Guests of Honor include **Clive Barker** and **Charles de Lint**.

The 2nd Annual *Deathrealm* Award Presentation will be featured on Saturday night, May 11. While editor Mark Rainey will unfortunately not be in attendance, **John Pelan** of Silver Salamander Press has graciously offered to host the

presentation.

The awards are a "People's Choice" honor, with ballots being circulated among *Deathrealm's* readers. The winners are selected by majority vote. While the 1995 winners have already been chosen, you'll have to wait for the presentation to find out who they are.

For those who can't make the ceremony itself, results will be published in the June, 1996 issue of *Deathrealm*.

Odyssey Fantasy Writing Workshop

JEANNE CAVELOS, FORMER senior editor for the Dell/Abyss horror line and World Fantasy Award Winner, has announced a new writers' workshop entitled *Odyssey*, scheduled to be held for six weeks at New Hampshire College in Manchester, NH. The subject matter, of course, will be horror/science fiction/fantasy, and will feature an intensive writing curriculum, as well as presentations by guest lecturers such as **Hal Clement**, **Elizabeth Hand**, **Ellen Kushner**, **Craig Shaw Gardner**, and **Jane Yolen**.

The focus of the program, CaveLOS says, is to focus on the development of plot, character, and world-building, and learning to get published. "Daily feedback" is promised on students' work.

The program runs from June 15-28, and can be counted as college credit for attendees. Housing may be available.

For more info, send a SASE to *Odyssey*, 316 Perley Rd, Francetown, NH 03043. Phone/fax (603) 547-3530, or email jcaveLOS@anselm.edu. Deadline for applications is April 1.

MAKE UP YOUR OWN MIND...

A LITTLE COMMENT re: the responses to Billie Sue Mosiman's last *View From the Castle Tower*. I won't begin to argue the pros and cons of Billie's comments in #25, but I'm a little disturbed by the notion that there are folks out there who let reviewers dictate everything they do or don't buy. A reviewer is *one person*, and thus the *opinion* of that one person. How many times have you heard Siskel & Ebert slam a movie only to find that practically everyone else in the world loved it? I've seen hundreds of reviews I disagreed with (in both directions) over the past years. Poll five reviewers on the same book or story, and you may get five different opinions. The only person who can tell you whether you like a book or not is *you*, not someone else. Take it off the shelf in a book-store and browse through a few pages; you'll be giving what may turn out to be a fine book and a great read a fairer shot.

--YVONNE NAVARRO
Hanover Park, IL

MORE & MORE AMORE...

I WAS INTERESTED to read Herb Greenhouse's review of *LITTLE DEATHS* in issue #26 but would like to correct some erroneous impressions. First of all, the book reviewed is the Millennium-UK edition of *LITTLE DEATHS*, which has about eleven more stories in it than the American-Dell edition (which is shown and priced in the review). Several of the stories he mentions are *not* in the American edition. {Editor's Note: Ms. Datlow is correct; the UK edition was not identified in the review header. Mr. Greenhouse was aware that there were differences in the editions.}

Secondly, Mr. Greenhouse seems unaware of how the publishing industry works. The first line of his review (and virtually the same line in his review of *FORBIDDEN ACTS*, the page before) says, "I'll say it again. They did it. Another, yes *another* anthology of erotic

horror." One might well ask, why, if he doesn't want to read another volume of erotic horror, is he doing so? And reviewing it no less? Obviously, readers enjoy them and are clamoring for more. But my actual point is that *LITTLE DEATHS* was published in the UK in 1994, which means it was finished and handed in to my publisher in 1993. And checking my records, I found that the first story was bought for the anthology in July 1992. Which means *LITTLE DEATHS* was one of the earliest anthologies of "sexual horror" (so-termed in my introduction to the edition Greenhouse reviewed) after the *HOT BLOOD* series and Michelle Slung's *I SHUDDER AT YOUR TOUCH* antho.

--ELLEN DATLOW
New York, NY

WRITERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE?

MY FAVORITE STORY in *DEATH-REALM* #26 is *The Coffin Maker* by Steve Antczak & Gregory Nicoll. Good horror westerns don't come along too often. I'd like to read more from this team.

Some of our letter writers apparently think Billie Sue Mosiman's commitment to positive reviewing means sucking up to famous authors. Funny, but I can't find exactly where she says that. *DEATH-REALM* isn't a thousand page tome. Why waste limited space on reviews of crap? Let it sink unpublicized into the slime. I get more out of a column that tells me about good books I should be sure not to miss. Besides, too many columnists already show off their own cleverness with vicious reviews; an easy way to get attention, but *très* tacky and ultimately boring.

However, I agree with Lillian Csemica that huge advances to blockbuster authors take income from other writers. In the last 35 years, entry-level salaries in most industries have doubled, yet in the "winner-take-all" climate of publishing, first novelists get the same advances they would have earned in 1960. This exploitation happens because so many authors compete for the pitifully few dol-

lars left after celebrity writers take millions. Low pay means most novelists work full time at mundane jobs to buy a couple of hours a day to write. The quality of midlist books probably suffers from their authors' lack of adequate time and energy. If someone objects to this destructive star system, bye-bye: 500 hungry writers lurk behind her in line. Workers of the world unite? Maybe, but writers' unions will keep decaying into social clubs as long as they can't stop non-joiners from scabbing. Somehow I don't foresee a niob of midlist authors invading a Worldcon to kneecap renegades who will write for a pittance. Writing for small presses may not be more lucrative, but at least it's democratic. Down here, we're all broke.

--LELIA LOBAN LEE
Falls Church, VA

HORROR ON THE REBOUND?

ALMOST FINISHED READING the new issue. Everything except *Adam* by Lynda Lyons. Best story so far is *The Coffin Maker* by Antczak & Nicoll (loved it!). *Whispers* is a freaky, weird, neat little tale which I also very much enjoyed. Piccirilli's story, *The Lean* was fun, and I've really come to notice how animated his fiction is: there really is a lot of action usually going on in a Piccirilli story. This one was a real toe-tapper, and it's very weird that you guys found Wayne Miller, the artist, living across the street from Dani D'Attilio! The guy is good.

The only story that's disappointed me thus far is *How Naethen Learned to See* by Partridge and Sallee, usually two guys whose work makes me happy. I also didn't much care for Wayne's story in that Datlow antho, *LITTLE DEATHS*, he's starting to be a little repetitive for my tastes: I can read about just so many twisted misfits before it all starts to sound like whining.

The interview with Tom the Mountain Lion was really neat...I like what he says about horror just being in a bit of a dip right now and on its way back

up...would like to agree with him on that one.

—ROBERT KAMEL
Charlotte, NC

NOT ONE CLINKER...

DEATHREALM #26 WAS one of the best fiction issues I've ever read. There was not one clinker of a story in its pages. Steve Antczak & Gregory Nicoll's weird western, *The Coffin Maker* was particularly excellent. *The Sins of the Flesh* by Joel McCollough was terrific also. Ghost stories don't usually make it for me, but this one hit the spot.

Along with the fine artwork and nice columns, I can't say enough. The profile of Thomas Monteleone was very informative and entertaining. I've been a fan of his writing for quite some time and have even read his largely unknown **LYRICA**. I guess I'm one of the dozen or so people in America who seem to have found a copy.

A prosperous new year to everyone at **DEATHREALM**, and keep the good stuff churning....

—FRED ZACHARCHENKO
S. Euclid, OH

THOSE HIGH AND MIGHTY SAVAGES

IN **DEATHREALM #26**, Andrea Locke begins her review of **WHITE KNUCKLES #2** with an all-out assault on Louise Dragon and her work. She then reiterates it in her review of **LORE #2**.

First, on behalf of Louise Dragon, I'd like to say that not everyone agrees with Ms. Locke's opinion. The editors of the two magazines in question, John Platt and Rod Heather, obviously saw in her work what Ms. Locke fails to see. Genuine talent. I happen to believe, as an admirer and friend of Louise Dragon, that she has a great deal to offer the horror genre.

Second, if you don't like the story, just say so. There's no need to be so hostile! One would think, upon reading this personal attack, that Ms. Locke holds some kind of grudge against Louise Dragon. That her savage words stem from jealousy and spite. Tsk tsk. Highly unprofessional.

Let us not forget, oh high and mighty reviewers, that we are dealing with people's work, and that people have feelings. Even when a story is bad, one can say so without attacking the writer on a personal level, as Ms. Locke has done with her review of Louise Dragon.

As a writer myself, I can only hope that such negativity will serve to make readers and writers curious enough to seek out more of Louise's work. It's well worth the effort.

I have learned, in my opinion, of course, that if Andrea Locke doesn't like it, it's probably pretty good!

—MICHELLE CALLAN PATTERSON
Arvada, CO

Please note that, while I agree Ms. Locke was—and is—quite sharp-tongued about stories that she disliked, all of her remarks were solely about the work itself; there was not a single personal remark made about Ms. Dragon's character. As editor, I very much frown on personal attacks and discourage all reviewers working for DEATHREALM from engaging in them. The closest the remarks Ms. Locke made to being personal would be roughly along the same lines as the last remark in your letter.

—Ye Editor

DEATHREALM #25 A BRILLIANT ISSUE

AS A NEWCOMER to the dark landscape of **DEATHREALM**, I am enamored by the particular grit and craft your uniquely stylized magazine exudes. Certainly you are to be congratulated.

However, the focus of my attention is on two excellent pieces found in **DEATHREALM #25**: Martin R. Soderstrom's *The Rabbit Hole* and David DeWolf's *Massacre Summer*. The former was a stimulating whisp of a ghost story, a haunting reflection of the society we live in, wherein murder is a daily staple of the evening news. Although we are taught as youngsters to respect and uphold the law, it is a shuddersome truth that cor-

rupt police officials exist, bent on abusing their oaths, using their authority to commit heinous acts. Of course, this is not a reflection of all officers, mind you, but Soderstrom's short story made me freeze and contemplate the possibility. The shadowy apparition of the missing, buried haphazardly in unkept parks, backlots, etc., waiting to be found...truly a haunting tale.

DeWolf's story echoes another reality: the loss of innocence in young adults clearly too immature to comprehend responsibility for their actions. Whether this is a diatribe about the x-generation or merely a tale of careless behavior, I could hardly find much sorrow for the situation the main character, Russ, got himself into. But that is the reality that makes the story provoking, that this can and does happen far more often than we care to admit. On the lighter side, DeWolf's description of a large roach was especially colorful and humorous. The only negative is the silly and misleading title bequeathed upon this raw and well-written tale. It was everything but a massacre.

What a brilliant issue of consistent quality. I look forward to where **DEATHREALM** will take me next!

—GEOFFREY MCFARLAND
San Francisco, CA

Letters of comment are welcome. Send to: *Deathrealm*, 2210 Wilcox Dr., Greensboro, NC 27405. All letters submitted are considered for publication unless expressly stated otherwise by the author.

I Am, Therefore...

By Lucas Vancraven

I've walked caverns, ethereal with ice,
My eyes reflected, myriad, in the sheen
Of beauty deep, so deep it seemed the vice
Of spirit; power strong, and yet unseen.
My lovers I've seen crumbled into dust;
My heart has joined the caverns, dark and cold;
My iron will has withered, gone to rust,
My soul, along with sanity, I've sold.
My love has turned to hunger, light to death;
My dreams to haunted visions, lost in sin.
I've felt a thousand breath their final breath;
I've fought with death, and prayed that he would win.
And when at last I'm ended, and I'm gone,
The children of my thirst shall linger on.



Hidden Voices

By Danielle D'Attilio

...The sound of wind came rushing down like an incoming rocket and burst upon the middle of the lake, casting a huge circle of ripples on the water. The circle immediately boiled into a frothy wake...and the cutting edge of it rapidly made a beeline, heading straight for Stuart....

THEY'D BEEN WINDING steadily up hill on the narrow, rutted lane off Mountain Top Road for twenty minutes—though it seemed like hours to Stuart, who was driving. But to Ann, who had the window open and her head out, the drive was wondrous; the temperature kept dropping as they ascended, and the air smelled sweeter—ripe and rich with the dense growth of the forest which closed in on them from both sides. They'd left the heat and smog of Boston behind, and though Stuart repeatedly warned her of close branches, she just couldn't seem to pull her head back inside. Nor could she breathe deeply enough to satisfy herself. It was ambrosia.

The Jeep Cherokee took the road abuse well enough, but their supplies in the back did not; groceries jumped out of bags, and a bottle of either apple juice or wine clamored around on the floor. Stuart was about to ask Ann if she'd grab it before it broke, when the road took a steeper ascent—which didn't seem possible—and they sat slack-jawed in surprise, as if they were edging their way to the top of a roller coaster and anticipating a sharp drop at any moment. Stuart silently thanked God for the four wheel drive over and over again.

"No wonder your family keeps pawn-ing this place off onto one another."

The road suddenly leveled out, and, a few moments later, they were taken aback when the trees broke away, opening into an expansive clearing. And in the center, at the apex of the mountain, loomed Winfield Hall, shadowed in the gloam of the setting sun.

Stuart brought the jeep to an abrupt halt. In unison, they looked up at it, then down, then up again.

"Annie..."

"I had no idea," she said, placing one hand on his arm and the other over her heart.

Towering before them, the estate stood solid and daunting; three stories of uncertain architectural style, but of definite nineteenth century vintage; it had four gables—one facing each direction—jutting out into the Vermont sky. Each had its own chimney. Giant columns supported the wrap-around porch below, and even at a distance one could see the elaborate sculpture of their pedestals. The ground level windows stretched from ceiling to floor, and looked to measure at least ten feet from top to bottom. The most striking feature, though—the belfry—sprang from the middle where the four gables met, and, oddly enough, a widow's walk had been built atop of it.

"All it needs are gargoyles."

"I think it's magnificent," Ann replied, envisioning a plethora of nooks and crannies inside, each awaiting her eager exploration.

"What style is it?"

"Distinctly Winfieldian; my great, great uncle Arvis designed it himself."

"Creative man. I just hope the plumbing works and the electricity is turned on."

"Fear not, oh worrywart. I took care of it."

"It's almost dark. Let's go."

The road continued on about a hundred yards, then looped into a circular drive. Stuart brought the jeep to a much deserved rest at the foot of the steps. They unloaded their supplies onto the great porch, and walked hand in hand into Winfield Hall.

ANN AWOKE AT dawn to the crazed calling of loons. Stuart slept on. She watched

his back rise and fall with each silent breath, and resisted the urge to run a finger down the smooth, tight skin of that back. Stuart had put in extra hours at the precinct the day before, tying up loose ends. He'd been the one to brave the Friday evening commute out of Boston, using the rest of his strength to resist screaming at the other drivers. And, he'd been the one who'd concentrated on where they were going while she, head out the window, had marveled at the roadside flora as they traveled through Vermont. He could use the sleep.

The antique bed coils squeaked angrily as she swung her legs over the side. Stuart stirred but did not wake. She paused, then carefully got out and tiptoed her way to the window. They had chosen a second floor room in the gable facing east; the sun was slowly edging its way up, and orange-yellow beams spilled over the countless peaks of the Green Mountains, which poked through a blanket of morning mist that would soon burn off. All else remained hidden beneath. She sighed in contentment, and looked back at her sleeping man. His shoulder holster was slung over the bedpost with its thirty-eight tucked snugly inside.

Ann took one last glance out the window before heading down to the kitchen. Sure enough, the mist was breaking up. The loons were still at it, though she could not see them. They were probably flying over the lake, and she looked forward to observing them from the northern side of the porch. Coffee had crept into her mind, and once there, it could not be denied.

She turned her back on the window and walked to the door. Had she stayed a few minutes longer, she would have seen

the mist completely dissipate everywhere... with the exception of one lone peak where the mist continued to swirl—green, and strangely alive.

"ANSWER ME THIS, Annie: why would a house this far inland have a widow's walk?" They'd spent the day exploring the house and its grounds, and now sat facing the lake, slowly rocking on the porch glider—the only recent addition to the furniture as far as they could tell.

"Maybe old Arvis simply wanted to go up and view it all. The house is at the very summit of this mountain, you know. Not only that, but he had once owned a merchant ship or two before coming up here and getting into paper mills. It could've been that he missed the sea. It makes sense."

"Yes, it does. It just seems so out of place. The only ones I've ever seen were in Gloucester. Remember?"

"How could I forget?" she said, resting her head on his shoulder; they'd spent what she considered the most romantic weekend of her life in a coastal hotel, the home of a long dead sea captain. It had had a widow's walk.

"Don't fret about it, just enjoy it. We could go up there tonight and stargaze," she said, and patted his thigh. He pretended to be pleased with this, but she knew him well enough to know that his detective's instinct would latch onto even such a trivial detail.

He slung an arm around her, and they swayed in silence for a while, each in their own thoughts—which, had they compared notes, were surprisingly similar. He had his puzzle, she had hers.

"Stuart, what about the phones?"

"Hmmm. That's right—your computer. I can live without phone calls—we're too far out of range for my cellular—but you'll need to upload your laptop onto home base."

"That's not what I'm wondering about. I'm referring to what might have happened to them. C'mon, Sherlock, elucidate."

"It looks like someone ripped them right out of the walls."

"We know that, but why? Why would someone do that?"

He thought for a moment, then asked, "Which relative visited this place last?"

"My cousin Charles, I suppose. He's the one who turned it over to me."

"Didn't something strange happen to his family up here? Didn't someone get killed?" Stuart remembered a wedding they'd attended some time ago, and there had been some talk of it among her cousins. That, and questions as to when they would get married.

"Not killed. Lost, I think. That's it. Someone disappeared while they were visiting. Another family member—a distant cousin."

"Who owned this place before Charles?"

"You know, I never thought to ask. Of course the lawyer did a title search, but I didn't follow up on who and how many have owned it."

"How well do you know Charles?"

"Not very well. He's quite a bit older than me, and his family—his mother and father—didn't stay in touch with mine very much. I've met him twice."

"Why, then, would he pass this place off to you?"

"That," she said as she rose, "is the sixty-four thousand dollar question. I'm getting hungry. Let's eat."

He followed her into the house, a hundred questions dancing in his head. As she passed by it, he glanced at the answering machine they'd brought which was now rendered useless, then to the impotent wires dangling from where a jack had once been. The look of those wires made him uneasy, but the thought of her staying on after he went back to Boston made him cringe. They'd get the phone company up here to take care of it. If not, then she'd have to spend the rest of the summer in the city. To hell with tranquility.

THE JEWEL SKY draped around them from the widow's walk where they lay. Neither of them knew much about astronomy, nor did they care; the night was clear, the new moon had just passed, and never before had they viewed the sky without the interference of city lights or smog. Dozens of shooting stars had scratched across the heavens, and Stuart commented that he'd heard the expression, "the stars seemed close enough to touch," many times before, but never truly appreciated its meaning until now. They'd been up there for hours, and had yet to grow tired of the view. They would've stayed up there longer, in fact, if Ann hadn't stood up for a stretch and looked down at the grounds to find the lower half of the house enshrouded in fog.

"Stuart, look at that."

"Look at what?"

"Down below," she said, pointing and tugging at him to get up. Complying, he rose and went to the rail.

"Just a night mist, Ann. Haven't you ever seen one in the movies—the kind that hugs the ground?"

"Yes, I have. But never in real life. And look—it's just around the house, not the grounds."

They stood silent for a moment, curiously watching. Even in the moonless night, the motion of it was distinguishable; swirling, it moved counter-clockwise around the house, the outer edges lapping at the grounds...and it was rising.

"Let's go in. I feel a chill, and I don't want to get damp if it reaches all the way up here."

They made their way down the steps to the belfry, and from there, took another look over the side. The fog seemed much closer. Ann tugged at Stuart once more, and went through the hatch. Stuart closed it behind them.

Once inside, they went to the nearest window, and could see nothing through the murk; the fog had reached the third floor. By the time they got to the second, it was gone, having risen up and over the house.

"I'd hate to have been caught in that. My hair would never have forgiven me," she said, and smoothed a hand down her long, auburn hair in a feigned gesture of haughtiness. He'd seen her do such things in times of unrest, and it brought only a wane smile to his lips.

"Okay. So it gave me a case of the creeps. What can I say?"

"Say, 'let's go downstairs and have a glass of wine.'"

"Let's go downstairs and have a glass of wine."

"Good idea."

And off they went down the corridor past guest quarters that had once been filled with life, where the wallpaper now peeled and cracked with age. The echoes of their footfalls grew louder and more lonely as the corridor opened into stairs that encircled the grand foyer, stairs that went on and on, down to the marble floor where the boots of young men once trod, smelling of leather and horses. Stuart and Ann proceeded slowly, respectfully, as if walking through a museum; each with their own images of what it might have

been like to have lived in this house long, long ago.

THEY CHOSE A sitting room in the west wing for its small size and because it had a fireplace; the temperature had dropped considerably, and this particular room would likely hold the heat better than the others. The former occupants had left a pile of wood on the porch by the pantry door, and Stuart had a comfortable little fire going. Both sat opposite each other, reading and drinking wine. Ann looked up from her book.

"What did you say?"

"I didn't say anything."

"Oh."

The fire popped and crackled. Outside, a low wind blew, occasionally rattling a window pane or two. A few moments later, Ann looked up at him again, irritated. She'd heard a faint whisper of *esses*, and assumed he'd been absentmindedly reading aloud to himself; a small quirk, but annoying nonetheless. She thought she'd broken him of it. Ann watched, waiting to catch him in the act, but his mouth remained still. She was about to bend to her book once more when she heard the whispering again... and Stuart's lips hadn't moved.

"Did you hear that, Stuart?"

"Hear what?" he said, not looking. Ann paused for a moment till she heard it again.

"That."

Stuart finally raised his head, reluctantly dragging himself away from an unsolved homicide case that had absorbed him. He cocked an ear, listening.

"I don't hear anything."

Ann held up a hand to stifle him. "Shhh. Wait a second... there it is again."

This time Stuart heard it: a flurry of voices—or so it seemed; hurried, yet hushed, like those of a secret, urgent meeting. Then it was gone, as if swept away by the soft breeze that blew past the house. They looked at one another.

A sudden gust of wind chattered the windows. Ann tensed in her chair. Once it passed, she picked up her glass and drained what was left of her wine.

"You heard it, Stuart? The whispers?"

"It sounded like that, yeah. But Annie, we're far from the city and on the top of a mountain. This house is over one

hundred years old. Nothing to get antsy about."

"You're right. Of course, of course," Ann said, nodding. She picked up her book, glanced at it, then put it back down. Stuart watched her thoughtfully.

"I can think of something to do to distract you," he said, his voice low and sultry.

"I'll bet you can."

Stuart drank the rest of his own wine, put the glass down and gathered Ann into his arms, carrying her as far as the stairs. The *esses* whispered on, unnoticed.

JUST PAST THREE in the morning, the wind whipped up and howled past the house. Stuart tossed about in his sleep, but did not wake. A dream held him. In it, he and Arvis Winfield stood atop the widow's walk.

"There 'tis!" shouted Winfield. "Comin' from the north, from the north!"

"There 'tis!" shouted Winfield. "Comin' from the north, from the north!" He folded his spyglass and turned to Stuart. "Get down in the belfry and start ringing, boy..."

He folded his spyglass and turned to Stuart. "Get down in the belfry and start ringing, boy."

"What's coming? What?"

Winfield bent his face to Stuart's, looking at him closely. Beneath drooping lids were eyes that spoke of an unflinching resolve which, in comparison, conflicted with the rest of the man; his body jumped and twitched within its clothes, his mustache quivering with each facial tic, and his expression was very near madness, though Stuart knew that he was not. It was obvious he knew of something unspeakable, something coming from the north, and it had him terrified to the point of palsy. Stuart no longer wanted to know, and backed away. Cold hands reached out and shook him.

"Come on, boy. Now step lively! To the belfry!"

As the dream fragmented, Stuart rolled over, waking briefly. He refused to dwell on the dream, knowing how such things had a way of keeping a person from his rest. Pushing it out of his mind, he fell back into a light, uneasy sleep.

ANN ALLOWED HERSELF the luxury of waking slowly, dreamily; a finch sang sweetly outside her window, and the smell of salt air slipped up her nose. Perfect day for a walk in the market place for lobsters. Nothing like a Saturday in Boston to—

Her eyes flew open. This wasn't Boston, but the Green Mountains of Vermont. Salt air? She rose and went to the window, opened it fully and took in a breath. Unmistakable. Could a sea breeze come this far inland? There must be one hell of a storm beating the coast right now—or yesterday, more than likely. Dressing, she thought it quite possible.

Stuart had gone off and let her sleep. After last night, she thought with an inward smile, he must have decided that she needed it. She gave her hair a quick brushing and went downstairs.

Breakfast was waiting for her in the kitchen. A bowl of cereal sat covered with plastic, and various fruits had been cut up, set aside in another covered bowl. He'd even left a mug and spoon out for her, and a note that said: "Gone walking. Love, S." The inner smile surfaced to her face.

NOT LONG AFTER sunup, Stuart rose from his fitful night's sleep. He dressed as quietly as he could and went down to the kitchen.

After an ample amount of coffee to compensate for his lack of rest, he ventured out into the morning, down toward the lake. He managed to get halfway there before noticing something amiss.

The air was still; nothing moved, nothing sounded. Gone were the loons and their crazy callings. No screech bugs, no rustling in the brush. The sound of his own feet crushing the tall grass seemed tremendous in such silence. As he neared it, he saw that the lake surface was smooth, unbroken by the usual sight of fish nipping at something floating on the water. He continued on to where the path turned to gravel, winding around giant, spreading maples, and sloping down to the pier. He stopped every now and then, listening for anything but the sound of crunching underfoot. But he didn't stop for long; the silence seemed oppressive, and it actually hurt his ears. He missed the loons.

He reached the pier, walked to its end and stopped—

Something was coming.

The sound of wind came rushing

down like an incoming rocket and burst upon the middle of the lake, casting a huge circle of ripples on the water. The circle immediately boiled into a frothy wake...and the cutting edge of it rapidly made a beeline, heading straight for Stuart.

"...Comin' from the north, from the north!"

He turned and ran.

Just before it hit, Stuart heard the gust swoop upon him from behind. A shove to his back hurled him off the dock and he flew headlong up the path—propelled, he thought with horror, by what felt like unseen hands. The hill rose up to meet him, and he dove into it, eating gravel.

Stuart quickly rolled onto his back and tried to sit up, but could only manage to lean back on his elbows. Sharp pain began to register in his head and hands. Blood ran into his eyes. He tried to blink it away.

The trees were alive all around him; a nightmare awash with a morbid shade of pink. He felt the wind, but instead of rocking him as it did the trees, little puffs of air nipped all about his body. They blew his hair, his face, and down to his neck where the collar of his shirt lifted slightly. They blew up his pant leg and about his shins. Though they were gentle, he sensed corruption in them; a malevolent lewdness, and their touch left him feeling...unclean. Stuart cringed.

Ann!

He got to his feet and started toward the house on shaking legs. And as the air continued to kiss at him, he went faster, trying to escape what he felt to be a strange sort of molestation.

The house appeared to be backing away from him—or he from it, though he knew he was running forward. There seemed to be less air to breathe, and he opened his mouth wide, sucking in huge gulps.

It blew its way inside him.

Stuart clutched his chest, and collapsed into the tall grass.

HER NOTE READ: "Gone walking, too. See you at lunch."

Ann clomped her way through what had once been a magnificent rolling lawn which, after years of indifferent maintenance, had turned into a meadow of thick brush and wild flowers. Without knowing it, she passed within twenty feet of Stuart,

whose own beaten path had long since sprang back up. She banked right, heading east and then into the woods where the coolness hit her immediately, and she was glad to be alone here to wander...and to have a cigarette. Stuart hated it when she smoked, and this was her first opportunity to puff away completely uninhibited. Wherever Stuart was, he wasn't here to nag her in this wonderful, secret place.

Ann loved the forest, loved the damp, earthy smell that emanated, she believed, mostly from layers of dead leaves that had piled year after year on the ground.

Deeper she went, walking among trees whose upper greenery fragmented the sun into grayish-yellow streams. Ann constantly looked over her shoulder to record in her mind the way she had come. Too bad, she thought, that she hadn't brought a bag of bread crumbs. No matter. She'd been born with a natural sense of direction, and it had never failed her.

She came upon a small pool of standing water, born of a tiny underground spring. A fallen tree rested beside it; the perfect forest throne. Sitting, Ann reached in her shirt pocket for a cigarette.

As soon as she lit it, the match went out. Ann looked about her, at the stillness that prevailed on this fine July morning, and lit another match.

It, too, went out.

Frustrated, she lit another—then another and another, the tiny wisps of smoke trailing away. Holding the latest dead match between her fingers, she noticed that the trees had begun to sway ever so gently. She couldn't feel the breeze.

Craning her neck, she looked straight up. In this spot, giant pines towered above, leaning toward each other, forming a cone that went on and on until the sky was but a blue button hole a thousand miles above. She'd seen this illusion before, but had never felt intimidated by it—or dwarfed, as she felt now. Sliding off the log, she continued to look up, moving around to change the perspective. The cones followed, shrinking her even more. Without realizing she was doing it, Ann began to make her way back.

And then, all semblance of serenity shattered with the sudden eruption of a wind so loud it forced her to clamp her hands over her ears in defense. The forest responded, but it perplexed and frightened Ann because she could not feel it. Not one hair on her head even so much as trembled.

She hurried along, looking over her shoulder. The limbs of the smaller saplings seemed to be waving goodbye. She broke into a run.

The trees began to sway violently—not in one direction as if the wind were pushing them, but in all directions; their trunks creaking with the strain. Dead leaves rose up from their resting place on the forest floor as though they'd been summoned, forming numerous funnels that swirled about the trees like children dancing rings around their parents. Ann stopped running and turned round and round, eyes wide, confirming that yes, this was happening, and then spun faster, joining in the madness, unable to hear her own screams above the tempest.

And then it all stopped: Ann heard the wind retreat with great speed, as if it were quickly being sucked up into a vacuum. When it ended with a sudden pop!, the trees snapped to an immediate stand still as though they'd never so much as stirred. The leaves dropped to the ground once more but some fluttered lazily; the only proof that they had been alive at all.

Ann slowly lowered her hands from her ears. All was quiet as before except for the thumping of her heart, and she stood there listening, holding her breath, holding back a guttural cry that begged for release. If she let her fear overcome her, she risked getting lost. And after what had just happened... Ann looked about, making sure she was on the right path. She was, and, keeping herself reined, began walking back the way she had come.

Just as she was beginning to come back to herself, she smelled the sea again—not the good smell of salt air, but that of a putrid low tide, as if something dead and stinking had been dredged up and left behind to rot on the beach, tangled in seaweed, covered with flies; something the sea gulls wouldn't dare light upon.

"No...oh what? What now?" Ann whined, digging her fingers into her cheeks.

In response to her seemingly innocuous question, a myriad of discordant voices came floating through the forest. Some whispered in urgency, slipping essences off their unseen tongues. Others, deep and disturbing, dragged out their vowels with excruciating slowness. Ann tried to follow one voice but could not; they ran all over each other like a chorus of the insane, and the result was incoherent utterings that

only the trees seemed to understand. Yet, it did seem to her that some of the softer voices had said, "listen, listen," but she couldn't be sure. And every now and then an awful titter would make her jump, bring her closer to the complete panic which thrummed below the surface of her composure like a live wire.

On and on it went: the flitting of essces past her ears, the noxious smell of low tide, the occasional cackle... it held her in a state of near mental and physical paralysis—which broke when the green mist emerged through the trees, tendrils winding round toward her.

Ann fled the forest on a trail of her own screams.

WHILE STUART LAY unconscious, images flashed through his brain like a disjointed movie; juxtaposed but without gestalt:

—A wooden ship groaning as it rose and dipped in the ocean swells made visible by the fullness of the moon.

—The sound of dripping water. Long corridors made of stone, wet and glistening in the dim glow of lanterns. Many, many doors. Screaming, talking, cries of sorrow, peals of laughter. Water dripping endlessly.

—Men and women of different ages clutched the rail of a ship. Some stared blankly, seemingly oblivious to their surroundings. Others grimaced with the rise and fall of the ship. Most muttered nervously, their faces twisted in fear. One woman looked up at the moon and howled. Few were silent. All were wet with spray.

—Being led through the stone corridors, tied to one another. Outside, a huge, windowless horse cart stood waiting while they were shepherd inside its rear doors. Two men wore straight jackets, and had to be lifted in. Both screamed and kicked.

—Arvis Winfield instructing a solemn crew to lower two life boats. One man refused. He was then promised double pay, as were the others.

—Standing next to the horse cart, a tall man dressed in fine clothes handed Arvis Winfield an envelope. A woman with wild hair broke away from the others and threw herself at this man's feet. She was dragged away. The doors closed. A horse whinnied, and the cart began to roll. They fell against one another in the complete darkness.

—Arvis Winfield standing port,

watching. His facial muscles working hard to find some sort of comfortable expression. He lifted a hand to them, as if to call them back, and then slowly lowered it. As the ship moved away, the lanterns became pinholes of light, and the ship itself just a dark shadow. Then the boats drifted apart from one another.

—A man cried out for his mother.

On and on the scenes rolled in Stuart's mind, until someone began calling for him, breaking through, bringing him out. He slowly came to, nauseated. Without holding back, he retched and sputtered till finally his breakfast came up. Whatever had entered him came out with it. Stuart heard Annie screaming his name over and over, but was too weak to call back. He began to crawl toward the house.

ANN BURST THROUGH the doors of Winfield Hall, slamming them shut behind her. She ran to the window and peeked out from behind the drape. Nothing. She called out for Stuart again, but there was no reply. Winded, she headed for the kitchen, passing by the dead phone and the answering machine.

It was blinking.

She slowly extended a shaking finger to press the button, but couldn't bring herself to do it. The plug lay on the floor. She backed away from it.

No. Enough of this. Enough!

She continued on to the kitchen, and looked out the window for any sign of Stuart. Toward the lake, she noticed the grass rustling. Something was moving through it. She moaned, and her knees went weak, but she held onto the counter for support. Her mind raced. What to do? What to do?

Stuart's head poked up from the grass.

"Stuart!" she screamed, and bolted from the kitchen. Moments later she was at his side, helping him to his feet.

"Annie, oh thank God you're all right," he breathed, reaching for her. They stood clinging to each other until Ann pushed away.

"We have to get in the house. Right now, Stuart." She kept casting fearful glances toward the woods. "Please," she implored, pulling his arm. She didn't have to pull too hard. They made their way up to the house, listing like two lone survivors leaving the scene of some terrible disaster.

THEY BRIEFLY EXCHANGED accounts

as they threw their belongings together. Stuart had strapped his gun to his chest, though he doubted it would be of any use against whatever was out there.

"I'm going to burn this place to the ground," Ann said with resolve. "That's what Charles should have done."

"I don't think that will get rid of what's out there. Do you?"

"Maybe. Maybe not. But at least there won't be any reason for anyone to come up here. I don't know what else to do."

He nodded, snapping his suitcase shut.

Once down stairs, they came upon the answering machine. Its light still blinked, impatient. Stuart reached a finger to it, but Ann batted it away.

"No. If that tape contains what I suspect it contains, Stuart, you don't want to hear it. I know I don't. Please believe me."

He studied her face, saw the desperation in her eyes, and chose not to argue. "Okay, okay," he soothed, stroking her hair. "Let's get out of here."

They picked up their suitcases and walked out the front door.

And dropped them in unison when a clanging let loose from above. They stood there looking at one another, stricken.

The bells of Winfield Hall, unlovely, sounded as though rust flew with each strike of the clappers. A harsh, grating sound. And it wasn't that which froze them, but the thought of what caused them to ring. This time, Stuart's curiosity would not be denied, in spite of what he might find.

"I have to see," he said to Ann, slowly shaking his head. "Stay here if you want, pack the jeep if you want, but I've got to find out."

"I'm coming with you." She took his hand, and they ran across the lawn, stopping once the belfry came into view.

And there, ringing the bells, was the shimmering yet unmistakable image of Arvis Winfield.

"Just like my dream," Stuart gasped in wonder.

Winfield stopped and acknowledged them, then pointed to the northeast.

Out from the edge of the forest crept the mist, transforming all in its path into a haze of green; an underwater landscape where the grass and trees undulated like softly stirring seaweed. With it came the

HIDDEN VOICES

stench of low tide.

And the voices.

"It's them," Ann whispered. She did not run, but shrank behind Stuart.

Arvis Winfield began to ring furiously. The mist stealthily moved toward the house, rising, embracing the northern gable. The cacophony of voices heightened. Ann and Stuart did not move, but stood in dreadful fascination as Winfield climbed to the widow's walk, pausing to shake his fist at the approaching murk. The bells continued to ring unattended, sounding slow and garbled as the mist swallowed the belfry.

Winfield, now atop the widow's walk, stood at parade rest, his head held high. His watery face expressed determination, resigned, yet dignified. The fetid vapor wound around his legs. He did not move. It rose to his torso. He did not flinch. It completely engulfed him.

He dissolved into screams.

The once morose tone of the voices now sounded in malign jubilation; a gleeful, lascivious blathering that sent Stuart and Ann running toward the jeep. Before getting in, they paused once more, unable to deny the screams of Arvis Winfield.

The mist retreated from the house, moving toward the lake. Green tendrils of

moisture trailed behind, flapping away, licking the trees, lapping the water. Winfield's screams became distant as it neared the other side of the lake.

Instead of disappearing into the woods, it rose up into the air—an entity in a green diaphanous gown billowing in the sky—where it hovered above the treetops. It then began to fold in on itself.

As the last trace of it became almost indistinct, it soundlessly exploded, breaking apart into colorful scintilla that winked like the falling sparkles of fireworks.

And at that moment—just for a moment—Stuart and Ann heard tiny, triumphant cries which fell silent as the sparkles died out.

"ARE YOU SURE there's nothing in there that you wanted to keep?" Stuart asked.

"It's a little too late for that, don't you think?"

"I guess it is." He put an arm around Ann's waist. They stood watching as fire consumed Winfield Hall, floor by floor. When the third story windows exploded and flames leaped toward the roof, Ann let out a sigh.

"That's that. Let's go."

The couple backed away silently, and got into the jeep. Stuart paused behind the

wheel.

"What?"

"I kind of felt sorry for him, you know?"

Ann nodded. A tear slid down her cheek.

"Hey, it's okay," Stuart said, gently brushing her hair from her face.

"No, it's not okay. I just burned down a part of my own heritage. I understand that it was necessary, but that doesn't make me feel better about it."

"Do you know where Arvis Winfield is buried?"

"In Ipswich. Why?"

"You could bring flowers to his grave. Maybe that would help you to feel better."

She smiled. "Yes, I think it would."

"Then we'll go there sometime."

"Sometime," she said, and took one last look out the rear window. "Let's go."

As the tired jeep began its last trek over the rutted road that led to Winfield Hall, bells rang out from behind.

Stuart stepped on the gas.

Exhaust choked out from the tailpipe...swirling green, and strangely alive.



The Crimson Cad

by Scott David Aniolowski

From the stygian patina of the soul,
Hounds and hellish trumpets blow.
From Hell and back, and back again,
Prince and paupers 'neath the gaze of Ben.
Players in the Theatre of the Absurd,
Whispering confessions gone unheard.
Walls and courtyards their secrets keep
While tears of blood the innocent weep.
For sport and hunt just for jolly:
Victims of Victoria's folly.
Darkened lusty strumpet fare;
Silent scream and deathless stare.
And from out of a hundred years of breathless sleep,
The Bloody Prince the streets doth creep
To slash and play his funny games,
And taunt and tease with unknown names.
In foggy streets lamps pale sicker:
The kingdom of yours truly, Jack the Ripper.

I Want to Be a Vampire

by Darrell Schweitzer

"I want to be a vampire,"
the little girl said.
She was even more a child to my eyes
with her black lipstick, eye-shadow,
leather, metal, and powdered-on pallor,
her knee-high boots and affectations of despair.

One of the damned, she would have me believe,
a friendless night-wanderer ripping out throats
of those she once loved;
a little girl playing a little girl's game.

And yet I have to admit
that it was her pain that attracted me to her,
and that her emptiness
was the secret of her appeal.

Tentacles Across The Atlantic

by d.f. lewis



ART BY ROGER GERBERDING

"The imagination of the solitary child, left so long to its own resources, was lit up with understanding... Among the dim shadows of these deserted stairs and cool, lofty halls the Man was at home, his black figure invisible in their darkness."

—From **THE FRUIT STONES**
by Algernon Blackwood

ALGERNON BLACKWOOD (1869-1951) is more often than not referred to as a British author of ghost and fantasy stories — merely that. In fact a prominent British horror magazine recently ran an article on Blackwood, purportedly exhaustive, but one which only considered his short stories. Admittedly, his stories are wonderful — and, in fact, H.P. Lovecraft's favourite weird tale

was Blackwood's *The Willows*. As frightening and as haunting as those of Robert Aickman, Oliver Onions, M.R. James, E.F. Benson, H. Russell Wakefield, William Hope Hodgson &c, Blackwood's stories (e.g. *Ancient Sorceries* and *The Wendigo*) will stick with you forever, especially if you read them in the middle of the night with the aid of a single candle! Also, his John Silence occult investigator character is justifiably famous — but, again, only from short stories. However, it seems to me that most people ignore Blackwood's novels, novels which I consider to be works of genius....

I suspect this is because the novels — when they are actually mentioned — are lightly written off as fairy tale novels for children. And, in many ways, when children didn't spend all their time glued to computer screens and had a good grounding in stylistic English, they would certainly have enjoyed these explorations into occult and mystic realms of fear, since the novels,

indeed, feature children as their protagonists. Child-like grown-ups, I guess, are the only possible candidates for wonderment, these days, because most of our real children have been 'spoilt'. And those grown-ups among us who read and write in the horror genre I've often thought are child-like, in this positive sense. They have not been jaded by the act of growing-old-too-quickly, they do not zombie round with cowed bleary eyes and a spiritless soul. Even madness is better than mindlessness.

My favourite Blackwood novel is **THE FRUIT STONES**, little Maria's frightening and emotionally touching journey beyond the skirting-boards to meet those after whom prune-pips are named. Also, a wondrous escape into darkness and wonder, where you

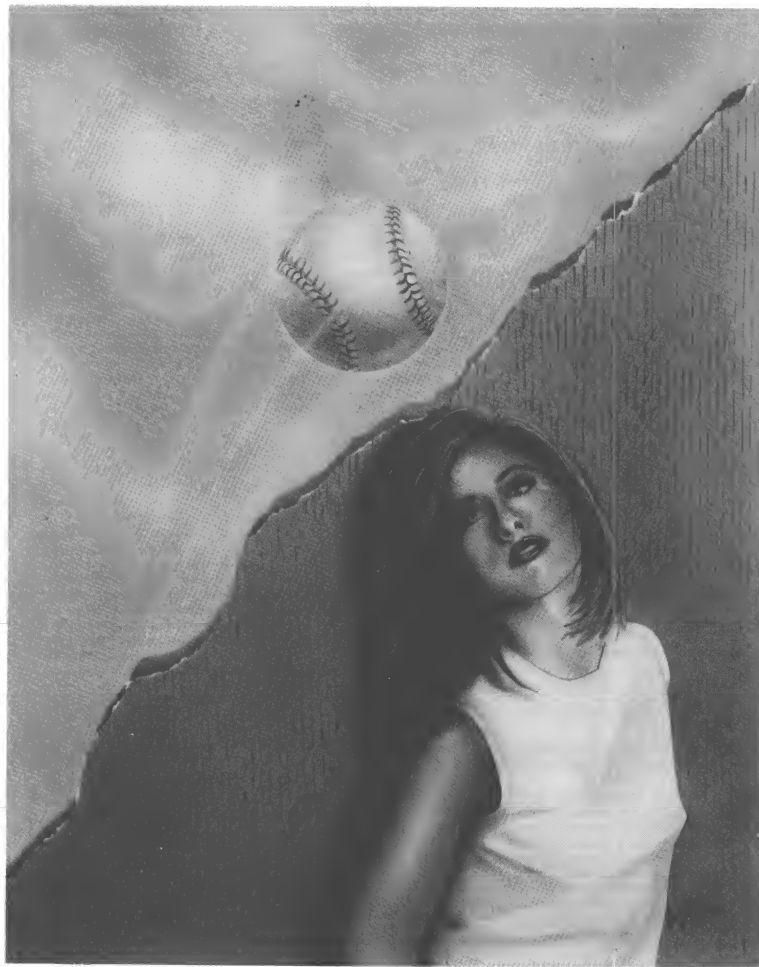
can actually sense yourself flying with the young protagonist over the awesome lands of night, is depicted in the novel called **JUMBO**. Others I would recommend are **THE EDUCATION OF UNCLE PAUL**, **PRISONER IN FAIRYLAND**, and **THE PROMISE OF AIR**.

Now, having mentioned earlier my hobby-horse regarding wonderment and spirit, I hope you will indulge me if I expand on this. I have a great faith that Mankind's creativity (particularly in literature and music) can be our only soul-mate in this otherwise material universe. Other people are merely passing strangers who you befriend or even love, but, through their very mortality, they will depart your territory, inevitably leaving you quite alone one day. And I feel that literature and music, where you can drift, or even fly like Blackwood's Jumbo, supply what you are missing when the world's crazy religions are shown up for what they are: just things that make people cruel to each other. Mankind can create his own bespoke world — and fantasy-horror fiction is a very efficient tool for expanding the mind beyond the matter that constricts it. I have always condemned mind drugs that are administered to the body from outside it. I have never taken such drugs (except, I admit, for my occasional weakness for drinking alcohol!) and I never shall. Drugs come from within.

Finally, it is the horror genre that works best for me. I've often asked myself why. Perhaps it's because there can be no goodness without its balance of bad. Perhaps Mankind is fundamentally ill-created, perhaps people have evil in-built at birth, and, by recognising those facts, by writing about the bad-the-ugly-and-the-frightening, one's honesty alchemically refines "the soul." Perhaps a vampire is only evil because of the human vehicle it drives.

"'Oh! but it's so wonderful!' he cried, drawing in the air loudly between his teeth, and shaking his wings rapidly like a hawk before it drops."

— From **JUMBO**
by Algernon Blackwood



ART BY MICHAEL APICE

Special Featured Author

William F. Nolan
Presents

Two From the Pack

"Why, they're only a pack of cards, after all."

--Lewis Carroll,

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865)

1 MAMA'S BOY



FOLLOWING HER AGAIN. Told not to. Warned not to. Restraining order on me. Can't get within a thousand feet of her. Can't talk to her. Can't go near her house. Can't do a lot of things I'd like to do. But we'll see what I can do. Don't let shitty cops tell me what I can do or can't do.

She knows me. Oh, yes! Scared of me. Thinks I'm crazy. Told the cops I was crazy. Got roughed up by them. Lousy damn cops! Weekend in jail. Smelly. Toilet backed up. Homos in there. Almost raped in the shower. Had to yell for a guard. Cold. Heater broken. Nearly froze my ass.

Promised I'd stay away from her. Did for a while. Now following her again. But being careful. Staying far enough away so she doesn't know I'm there. Watching her at night.

Standing on the grass outside her window. Watching her talk. Eat. Watching her laugh. Beautiful teeth. White as snow. Watching her tits.

Watching.

Following her to the studio in my car. Staying well back in traffic so she can't see me in her mirror. Going to her pictures. Sitting in the dark watching her on the screen. Feeling close. Smiling at her in the dark. So beautiful. So very beautiful.

Shrine to her in my Hollywood apartment. That's what the landlord called it once. A shrine. Posters from all her movies. Hundreds of glossy photos. Magazines with her in them. Lots of times with her on the cover. One with her in a thong bikini. Showing what she's got. Interviews with her. Some where she talks about her marriage. Divorced. How she never sees her ex-husband anymore. He lives in Kansas City with

another woman.

Went through her garbage. Found notes she'd written. Lists. Letters to her she'd thrown away. Best of all, a pair of her torn panties. Black silk, with lace at the edge. Keep them in a plastic bag. Special.

See her movies over and over. Every one of them maybe ten or twenty times. Never get tired of watching her.

We're very close. Meant for each other. Destiny.

Found out what studio she was working for now. Article in the paper. Followed her from the studio. To her new house. Big place in Brentwood. White with a red tile roof. Climbed up there one night. To see her undress in her bedroom. Exciting. Neighbor reported me. That's the first time the cops grabbed me. She told them to keep me away from her. Has a loaded gun in her house. Threatened to shoot me. Awful. Hurts to hear things like that. Why does she hate me? All I ever do is love her.

Second time the cops came was when she got home from the studio and I was on her porch. Waiting for her. I love you I told her. You are so beautiful. And I love your tits. To jail that time. Gave the cops a phony name. Have fake I.D. Don't give my real name. Ever. To anybody.

Judge puts restraining order on me. My picture in the papers. Said I should be in a mental ward. Treat you like shit in those places. On probation.

Changed myself since then. Cut my long hair real short. Now wear sunglasses. All the stars wear them. Shaved my beard. Makes me look different. Stare at my face in the mirror and it's like somebody else is there inside the mirror. Hello, stranger!

I'm thirty. Not old. Feel like a kid, in fact. Don't feel thirty. Used to live with Mama after Daddy left. Just the two of us. Slept in her bed. It was neat until I had to go to school. Always hated school. Didn't fit in. Grade school terrible. High school terrible. Got punched a lot. Blood on my clothes. Called me a mama's boy. What's wrong with being that? Always loved my Mama. Maybe too much. Had a psychological exam once.

Guy told me I was obsessed. Obsessive personality potentially psychotic. And other bullshit. That's all it is. Doctors bullshit. What do they really know about me? Just sit there spouting their crap. Can't see inside me. Nobody can. Deep inside. Real me.

No friends. Nobody to talk to. Don't trust people. Wouldn't understand the way I feel about her. Don't really mind. Like it being alone and thinking about when I'll see her again. Bet she thinks about me too. Whether she wants to or not.

Have a hunting knife. Long blade. Real sharp. After jail, for a little while, I was pissed. Ran the knife right through her photo. One where her tits show. She shouldn't of called the cops on me. But I forgave her. Don't hold a grudge. Not in my nature. Usually keep the knife in a locked drawer. Don't carry it when I follow her. Can't. Not smart. If the cops found it on me I'd probably go back to jail.

Went into a Hollywood store where they sell movie star stuff and bought this statue of her. Just her head and shoulders--no tits. Put it on a little platform and got some colored lights to go around it. Looks great with the apartment dark with just her statue and the colored lights making it glow. Almost like she's there with me in the room. Intimate.

She made a record from one of her movies. A musical. Has eight songs on it. Real nice soft voice. Close my eyes and just listen to her voice. Like an angel would sound. Know all the words to each song by heart. Play them over and over.

Hot today. Middle of August. She came out to her car wearing a light summer dress. Yellow, with flowers printed on it. Tight around her ass and tits. Exciting.

Followed her home. Had the knife in my car. Took it with me when I walked into her back yard and used it to pry open a window. First I cut the alarm wires. Know where they are. Don't want the cops coming to grab me again.

She's inside. In the den. Fixing herself a drink. Hate it when she drinks. Her face goes puffy and her hair and makeup get



TWO FROM THE PACK



messed and she doesn't care.

Kicks off her shoes. Settles into the couch. Snaps on the news. Sits there in her tight yellow summer dress with her drink, watching TV. Nobody else in the house. Maid's day off.

I go up to her. From behind. Put the tip of the knife blade against the faint blue vein in her neck. (My blood!) Smile at her as she jerks her head up, spilling the drink. Her eyes are round. Scared. She's really scared.

Love you, Mama, I say.

2

THE EX

THERE ARE MANY kinds of horror stories...

IT WAS LATE afternoon on a weekday. Clear and sunny. Not a cloud in the sky. Perfect baseball weather. When the door chimed I walked from the den to answer it. No servants. Not since the divorce. So it took me awhile to reach the front door. The chime was kicking echoes off the hallway when I got there. Whoever it was lacked patience.

I peered through the barred square in the door's center panel. Two young men in neat gray suits. Red ties. Neat and smiling, both of them. One tall, one short. The short one was carrying a leather case. "Who is it?" I asked.

"We'd like to talk to you, sir," the tall one said.

The short one unzipped the case and took out a baseball bat. He waved it in the air, still smiling. Nice teeth.

"I don't sign those anymore," I said. "No gloves or balls either. Sorry."

The short one nodded. "That's okay, sir. It's a real privilege, just being able to meet you in person. My son Bobby, he's seven. Thinks you're great. Rates you just below Spider Man."

I grinned. Kid must be a big fan.

"Is it possible we could talk to you, sir?" asked the tall one. "I mean, just for a few minutes maybe?"

"Be a real honor," said the short one.

I shrugged. Well, why not? I'd been dealing with ball fans for most of my adult life. In fact, now that I was retired, things were a little empty. I missed the ego-boost that fans can provide. Hell, I might even sign their damned bat!

"Step inside," I said, unlatching the door and swinging it back. "You fellas ever

watch me play?"

"Me, I did!" said the tall one. He had a high, girlish voice, sandy hair, and a bland, unremarkable face. "I saw you homer in the ninth, with the bases loaded, in that last World Series game. Boy, you really smacked the old apple! The crowd went apeshit."

I nodded, leading them into the den, chuckling at the memory. "Yeah, that was one of my better days. After we won the Series I decided to hang it up, leave on a high note. I'm just too frigging old to compete with all the young Turks. Man has to know when to quit. I've seen ballplayers go on for years past their prime and I've watched them lose the magic. It's a damn sad sight. When the magic's gone you've hit bottom. I quit while my name still meant something."

"Well, it sure means a lot in our family," said the short man. "My Dad, he used to talk to me about Babe Ruth all the time—the same way I talk to Bobby about you."

I was flattered. "Want me to sign that bat?"

The little guy was amazed. He had a round, pumpkin face, and now it lit up. "But I thought you didn't—"

"I'll make an exception," I said as he removed the bat from its case. Handed it over. I hefted it, swung it lightly. "Nice balance."

"Made the case for it myself," he said. "Custom leather. Special grain. Wanted to be sure it was protected."

I looked more closely. Pro model 125, an H&B Louisville Slugger 35-inch. Nice.

"DiMaggio used a Slugger," the little man said. "Early in his career. A model D 29. Me, I used to have a Spalding, but it cracked. They don't make 'em anymore."

"Not since the Second World War," I said, signing the H&B with a felt tip and handing it back to him.

"Hey—I'm really very appreciative," he said. "You know, my sister-in-law *hates* baseball! Can you imagine anyone hating baseball?"

"To each his own," I said.

"I just can't figure it," the little man continued. "Women! You can never figure a woman." He snorted. "Alma—that's her name—she thinks baseball is stupid. Makes no sense to her, all these guys running around these bases. I took Alma to just *one* ball game. She liked the open stadium, and the clipped green grass on the field, and the smells of hot popcorn and peanuts—but when the game started she was bored silly. Dozed through most of it. Women! You can never figure a woman. Sometimes, I think they live

in a different universe!"

The tall one had been admiring my trophy case. "Must give you a great deal of satisfaction, having earned these."

I nodded. "At least they prove I was out there. Sometimes, my whole career seems unreal, as if it all happened in a dream." I shrugged. "But I guess a lot of retired players feel that way."

"Yeah, I remember your saying that—about it all being like a dream—in the *Sports Illustrated* interview," said the short man. "The one with your picture on the cover."

"I was pissed about that interview. Copy editor cut it in half when they printed it. Made me sound like an idiot. The transcript I saw of the original was twice that length. But then again, my wife was always telling me that I talk too much."

The tall guy turned away from the trophy case to face me. His smile had faded, and he had a hard, intense look. "We didn't come here to get the bat signed."

"Oh," I met his steady gaze. "Then why did you come here?"

"Because of her," he said.

"Her?"

"You know," added the little guy.

"Your ex."

I stared at them. "Are you saying that my wife sent you?"

"In a manner of speaking," said the tall one.

"But she's dead!"

"We know," said the short one.

"That's why we're here."

"I don't understand."

"She wanted it this way," the tall guy told me. "Set it up before she died. Made all the arrangements personally. She seemed to get a kick out of it. Sort of chortled when she laid out what we were to do." He gave me a long stare. "Guess she didn't like you much."

"She *hated* me," I said. "Only stayed with me because of the money I was making—and because of who I was. She enjoyed being hooked to a celebrity...being identified as my wife. It made her feel important, since she had no talent of her own."

"Why did you put up with it?" This from the short guy.

"Because a divorce is costly, and I knew she'd blame the failure of our marriage on me. And I was right. She did. Hired a Beverly Hills lawyer. Jeez, but I got burned by that bitch. I knew she *hated* me—but until the divorce I didn't know how deep her hatred was."

"Yeah," piped the small guy, "you

wouldn't have liked what she said about you. Not very complimentary."

In thinking about my ex, I'd lost focus on just why the two of them were here. They still hadn't told me. I was suddenly angry. They were working for the bitch! Even beyond her death, she was still hounding me.

"If you've come for money--"

"No, we're being well paid," said the tall man. "Money isn't what this is about."

"Then, damn you, man! Why are you here?"

"To execute her orders," said the short guy. "To do our job."

I was distinctly uneasy. Whatever my ex had in mind would be negative. Something dark. Maybe even... I backed away toward the desk. "She sent you here to kill me!"

They both chuckled, shaking their heads.

"Naw," said the tall man. "Killing's not our line. The company has people who do that. Special people. But that's not us."

"For sure," nodded the short guy. "Not us."

"Then I don't understand why you--"

"Back up a minute," said the tall guy.

"Let's not rush. We're enjoying ourselves here."

"That's right," said the short one. "This is very enjoyable."

"You still watch the games?" the tall one asked.

"Uh...yes, of course. Just because I don't play anymore doesn't mean that I--"

"Bet you've got yourself a swell TV setup," said the short man. "I mean, big screen, Dolby sound...the works."

"It's adequate," I said.

"And that red silk robe you're wearing," said the tall one. "Must of cost plenty. The wife, she loves red silk. She'd look real snappy in a robe like you're wearing."

Despite my basic apprehension, they were making me angry. "Quit stalling," I snapped. "My ex had a purpose in sending you here. I want to know what's going on."

"In due time," said the tall man, grinning at me. "We've got all day."

"Yeah," said the other. "Our schedule is very loose." He took up a hickory's stance in the middle of the room, legs spaced, bat to shoulder. "When I was a kid I dreamed of playing in the major leagues," he said. "I was pretty good, too. I could sock the old apple pretty good." He swung at an invisible ball. "But I was too short to make the school team, let alone any pro team. Just too

runty, they said. God, but I hate being called a runt." He looked at me. "At least you're tall, like my buddy here. Tall guys they never call runts."

"The irony is, he gets to work with a bat after all," said the tall guy in his musical voice. "He's our official batboy."

The little guy grunted. "Not much like playing in the majors, but it's a living."

"Shall we tell him exactly what we're here for?" the tall one asked the runt.

"Yeah, let's tell him."

"It's like this," explained the tall one.

"Because you're kind of an icon to our kids, and because we both respect you personally, we're gonna give you a choice."

The runt hefted his bat. "Just one good smash. Kneecap or elbow. Your choice."

"Christ!" I breathed. "You mean to cripple me!"

"Not really," said the tall man. "You'll get over it. I'm sure you've got a real good doc. He can set the bone, maybe replace the parts that are too smashed up."

"You'll be fine," said the runt.

"How much are you getting paid for this?" I asked them. "I'll triple your rate!"

"That's bribery," said the runt, shaking his head. "We can't be bribed. We're pros. We've got our pride. Doing a job like this, it's not as simple as it sounds. You have to know just where to hit, and exactly how hard. Requires a lot of time to master the craft. I take pride in what I do. Money can't buy pride."

The tall guy put his hand on my shoulder. "The good thing about this is that your ex didn't die while you were still a player. This would have ruined you for the game."

"He's right," said the short one. "I'm just glad we didn't have to do this earlier. Now it's okay, with you being retired and all. It won't be a big problem for you."

The runt walked closer to me, idly swinging the bat.

"I'd advise you to choose the right elbow, since you're a southpaw. Then you can still use the other arm."

"Right," nodded the tall guy. "Kneecap's a bitch to heal. The bones don't knit as well, and you spend a long time on crutches. More pain there, too. I'd definitely go for the elbow. But..." He shrugged. "It's your choice."

"I'll phone the police," I said tightly. "They'll deal with this."

"Stay away from the police," the runt warned me, eyes flashing. "You try to call in Johnny Law and I'll really smash you. I

mean, a bad scene for you. By the time the cops get here you'll be a bloody mess. Heck, I don't want to have to do that to you. Especially not to you--being a personal hero of mine."

"You bastards!"

They both smiled blandly. "You don't have to like us for doing our job," said the tall man, "but we're not vindictive like your ex. She was definitely vindictive."

"Definitely," said the runt. "She arranged all this so you'd have, to quote the lady, 'something to remember her by.' Unquote."

"Damn her!" I snapped. "Damn her lousy soul!"

"Well, let's get to it," said the tall one.

"You name it, sir," said the runt. "Kneecap or elbow. Left or right side."

I realized that I had absolutely no option. I couldn't call the police. I couldn't escape. There was no one else in the house to help me. So I made my choice.

"Left kneecap," I said softly. "I need to use both arms. For the keyboard." I flushed. "I'm writing a book about my career."

"Okay, then," said the tall man, walking quickly behind me and pinning my shoulders in a wrestler's hold. "Go ahead. Go for the leg."

The runt took his hitting stance, looking serious. The bat was on his shoulder.

"Play ball!" piped the tall guy.

The runt smashed me.

The pain was incredible.

When the tall guy let go of me I collapsed to the den floor, screaming through clenched teeth. I was gripping my smashed knee, in agony. I'd been hurt plenty of times on the field, but it was nothing compared to this.

"You should have gone for an elbow shot," said the runt. "Kneecap's always worse." He carefully replaced the bat in its custom leather zipcase. "Well," he said to his partner. "Game's over."

The tall one leaned down, his face close to mine. "If you try to do anything about this, like calling in the police or anything, the company will send some other people over here to kill you. And I know you don't want that to happen."

"Right," nodded the runt. "Life is precious. Nobody wants to die."

All this happened five years ago.

I've walked crookedly ever since.

THERE ARE MANY kinds of horror stories.



TALKING WITH WILLIAM F. Nolan is a little like running a marathon—God help you if you're not in shape for it. His energy, his enthusiasm, his love for his life and his work come at you like a runaway freight train, whistle howling and sparks flying from the wheels. His conversation has the rhythms of a Dave Brubeck jam, the alliterations of a poet, and the wit of a James Thurber, so one cannot help but wonder how such a vibrant, articulate, and enviably joyful man can produce such horrific works as *The Party*, *Lonely Train A' Comin'*, *Major Prevue Here Tonight*, and *On 42nd St.* Maybe there's more going on behind that devilish smile than anyone dares imagine....

Nolan made his first short story sale in 1954 and has been a full-time professional since 1956. He has worked in over a dozen genres, racking up more than 1,500 sales—a total which includes 230 anthology and textbook appearances, 62 books, 130 short stories, 40 scripts for film and television, and over 600 profiles, essays, articles, poems, and reviews. He has delivered numerous public lectures and has served as a panelist at various World Fantasy Conventions.

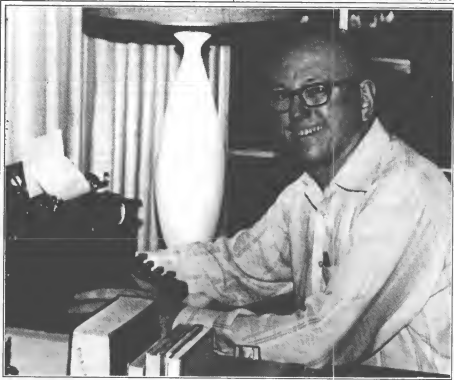
The recipient of some 30 honors and awards, Nolan has twice won the Edgar Allan Poe Special Award Scroll from the Mystery Writers of America. His most widely-known creation is the character of Logan, the futuristic *Sandman* who was the subject of three best-selling novels, a major MGM film, a CBS television series, a Books-on-Tape audio, and two comic book series. His *LOGAN'S RUN*, *LOGAN'S WORLD*, and *LOGAN'S SEARCH* have been collected as *LOGAN: A TRILOGY*, illustrated by Nolan himself (who began his career as a commercial artist).

In the relevant genre of horror/dark fantasy, Nolan's credits include three collections: *THINGS BEYOND MIDNIGHT*, *NIGHT SHAPES*, and *BROXA: A WORLD OF DARK SUSPENSE*, a novel, *HELLTRACKS*, a chapbook, *BLOOD SKT*, an anthology, *URBAN HORRORS*, and a guidebook from *Writer's Digest Books*, *HOW TO WRITE HORROR FICTION* (considered by many pros in the field to be the bible for aspiring horror writers). His work has been featured in such prestigious publications as *NIGHT CRY*, *TWILIGHT ZONE*,

William F. Nolan

Conducted by Gary A. Braunbeck

PHOTO BY JEFFREY M. ELIOT



WEIRD TALES (which published a special William F. Nolan issue in the Fall of 1991), and *CEMETERY DANCE*, and has been selected for numerous 'Best' collections (*BEST OF THE HORROR SHOW*, *THE YEAR'S BEST HORROR STORIES*, *THE BEST OF WHISPERS*, and *BEST OF WEIRD TALES*, to name but a few). His television and film credits include *TERROR AT LONDON BRIDGE*, *THE TURN OF THE SCREW*, *THE NORLIS TAPES*, *BURNT OFFERINGS*, and the infamous *TRILOGY OF TERROR*. And as if all of this weren't enough, in 1991, *NEWSWEEK* named his *PLAYBOY* story, *The Party*, as one of the seven most effective horror stories of this century.

No wonder he's got that devilish smile....

—Gary A. Braunbeck

GAB: Let's reverse things and start with the traditional closing question: What projects are currently in the works for you, and what can we expect to see from you in 1996 and beyond?

WFN: Well, for '96, there's *BROXA: A WORLD OF DARK SUSPENSE*, to be published by Widside Press—and I'll be out in *NEW MASTERS OF HORROR* and *NIGHTSCREAMS*. Having my work selected for anthologies is a particular pleasure. I take real pride in appearing alongside the masters, classic and contemporary. Each anthology is special for me.

My primary aim, at present, is to establish and extend my *BLACK MASK BOYS* mystery thriller novels set in Hollywood in the 1930s. When Joe Shaw was editing *BLACK MASK* magazine back in the pulp era, he dubbed his stable of writers "the Black Mask boys." The "boys" I chose to feature from Shaw's stable are

Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and Erle Stanley Gardner. They all wrote in Hollywood in the '30s, and I'm careful to keep their backgrounds wholly authentic. I involve them in fictional murder cases, but everything else is very real. I came up with the idea (unique, so far as I know) of alternating narrators from book to book. Hammett narrates **THE BLACK MASK MURDERS** (St Martin's Press, 1994), Chandler narrates **THE MARBLE ORCHARD** (1996), and Gardner does **SHARKS NEVER SLEEP** (1997). Then, for **ONCE A PINKERTON**, Hammett will take over again--and so on down the line.

Beyond these, I have a hard-boiled crime collection due, **THE BROTHERS CHALLIS**, and a special, limited, signed, fully illustrated edition of **LOGAN'S RUN**--leatherbound, and boxed in rosewood! Copper Dragon Books will publish it.

Then there's my continuing work for a variety of magazines; I'm due out in more than a dozen as of now. I like to keep busy.

GAB: Along with Ray Bradbury, Charles Beaumont, Richard Matheson, Isaac Asimov, Robert Bloch, and Rod Serling, you were one of the writers who helped not only to pioneer the content of imaginative fiction in the latter half of the century, but gain it a much wider audience as well--yet you're not granted their "legendary" status (something that has always puzzled me). Why do you think that's the case, and does it bother you?

WFN: Hey, but I am a legend! Richard Chizmar said so on page 272 of his anthology, **COLD BLOOD**. Quote: "William F. Nolan is a legend in the horror/suspense genres." Unquote.

Taking your question a bit more seriously, though, as to widespread name recognition, I'm something of a latecomer--yet I seem to be rapidly catching up with my colleagues. I have received high praise of late from Robert Bloch (just before his death), Peter Straub, Bradbury, Stephen King, both Mathesons (father and son), Dean Koonitz, Dennis Etchison, and Graham Masterton. Heavy company! And Joe R. Lansdale, who claims he's been deeply influenced by my work down the years, called my story *Lonely Train A' Comin'* a "masterpiece," adding that "Nolan is one of the greats of horror/fantasy." Stuart David Schiff of **WHISPERS** has named me "one of the field's most revered authors." And the beat goes on!

As to why it's taken so long for me to

achieve such recognition, well, that's due to my having jumped around so much, genre to genre, never giving my name a chance to build properly within a single field. I've worked in mystery/suspense, in hardboiled, Westerns, science fiction, technical writing, satire, auto racing, and, of course, fantasy and horror. I've been a book reviewer and magazine editor, written extensively for TV and films, done several biographies, along with verse, essays, and articles galore. You name it in writing, and I've done it. Aside from Asimov, none of the other authors you mention embraced such a wide range of genres and subject matter. The reason I'm now beginning to gain some major name recognition is because I have finally settled down in just two genres: horror and mystery. It takes a lot of books in a single field to gain a solid readership. I'm into this buildup now, and it's paying off. For example, both **WEIRD TALES** and **THE HORROR SHOW** have printed "Special" Nolan issues and, hey--here I am in **DEATHREALM** with *Two From the Pack*!

Has it bothered me not to have been considered a "legendary" name up to now? Not at all. I've been far too busy writing to concern myself with such matters. The quality of the work is what counts. Now, if I had written television scripts (in the 1950s/1960s) for **TWILIGHT ZONE**, as did Matheson, Serling, and Beaumont, this alone would have established my credentials as a name writer much earlier--but I'm getting there. I see new evidence of it every week. I'm getting there. Better late than never.

GAB: Though much of your work during the last decade has been classified as horror/dark/fantasy, there's a decidedly cross-genre flavor to it. **HELLTRACKS**, for instance, was as much a Western as it was detective story, as much a mainstream drama of familial love and obligation as it was an unflinching study of a serial killer, and as much an examination of traditional Native American mysticism as it was a supernatural horror story. Is this a conscious choice on your part, or is it simply a natural evolution stemming from your having grew and worked in so many disparate genres over your long career?

WFN: I don't quite know how to answer

that. With **HELLTRACKS**, I set out to write a horror novel. Period. I didn't plan a cross-genre approach. The plot, as it developed, dictated the locale, characters, and conflicts. It was a very tough novel to write, but not because I was attempting some kind of broad genre mix. I always work out of my passions, fascinations, fears, and enthusiasms--and **HELLTRACKS** simply evolved out of these. That's the best answer I can give you.

GAB: But you do enjoy cross-mixing genres. What about your **SAM SPACE** series, where your hero works on Mars as a private eye and has to deal with 3-headed clients and multiple dimensions?

WFN: Well, that's different. Deliberate. I wanted to take all the clichés of science fiction and mix them with all the clichés in the hardboiled detective genre. So far, with Sam, I've done two novels and four short stories. All great fun--and I even got an MWA Special Award out of one of them.

GAB: And your novella, **BROXA**?

WFN: Yes, that's another cross-genre mix--of supernatural horror and mystery. Again, an attempt to see if I could pull off such a combination. My attempt was validated when **BROXA** won "Best Story" from the readers of **WEIRD TALES**.

GAB: In relation to your personal approach to horror, you've been quoted as saying: "There's a theme that runs throughout most of my dark fiction: the loss of mental control... My characters walk a tightrope between sanity and insanity, and I find the breakdown of the human mind to be an endlessly fascinating subject." Does that still hold true with your current fiction?

WFN: Of course it does. Just consider *Mama's Boy*, my latest story in this issue of **DEATHREALM**. Yet another example of a twisted mind. The potential is endless, and my fascination with such "sick" characters remains as strong as ever.

GAB: As a child growing up in Kansas City, Missouri in pre-television days, you listened to many famous radio programs of the period--Captain Midnight, Jack Armstrong, Lights Out, I Love A Mystery--programs that relied heavily upon the spoken word to achieve their effect. Did listening to such programs teach you the

Last year alone more than 1.5 billion books were sold in the U.S. and fiction accounted for a full half of those sales...Go into any bookstore and you'll find the shelves jammed with new novels.

--WILLIAM F. NOLAN



A GRAVESIDE CHAT



value of good, literate dialogue (a cornerstone of your work, in my opinion)? Do you think television and motion pictures have lessened the importance of dialogue by putting most of the emphasis on the visual? **WFN:** It's likely that the dialogue in the days of dramatic radio *did* influence me to some extent, but you must realize that much of it was very strained and artificial. "Golly, Jack, here we are deep inside Mystery Mountain, walking through this damp, narrow cave in the heart of Africa! Whoa! What's that up ahead? I think I see a pair of slitted green eyes glowing in the dark on that rock ledge just above Uncle Jim's head!" Lacking visuals, radio dialogue had to tell you everything about the action and the scene, so it was never *close* to being realistic. I learned to write good dialogue by reading hundreds of novels and short stories by talented writers, from Hemingway to Joyce Carol Oates. A NEW YORK TIMES critic once stated that I had "...a fine ear for dialogue..." but it really isn't the ear you use, it's the intellect.

The dialogue in motion pictures and television is better than it was on radio since visuals are employed, but again it must be greatly stylized and compressed to keep the action moving. With rare exceptions, screen characters usually talk in shorthand. In prose, you can do much more with semi-realistic dialogue. I say "semi" because fictional dialogue is never *entirely* realistic. Can't be, since everyday talk is almost always boring and repetitious. All good writers know this. **GAB:** In a wonderful essay entitled *The Guys in the Trick Suits you described the joy and wonder that you as a child experienced when reading your favorite comic books of the 1940's era. That comic books had an influence on you is a matter of record; the question here, then, is: Do you still follow comics with the same unbridled enthusiasm, and do you think modern comics (graphic novels in particular) will have the same kind of positive influence on future generations of writers?*

WFN: Oh, I think so. I think they will. Naturally, I can't read the corny old 1940's comic books and newspaper comic strips anymore, although I can still appreciate the best artwork from that "golden age"—the great work of Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, for example (Simon and Kirby's **SANDMAN** influenced my Sandmen in **LOGAN'S RUN**). Then there's Will Eisner, Al Capp, Milton Caniff, and so many others.

Currently, many of the graphic novels—and I'm thinking especially of **WATCHMEN** and **THE DARK**

KNIGHT RETURNS--are very readable and powerful at their own level. As a kid, I was a Batman freak, and still retain a large collection of his adventures. Much of the new stuff done on him is incredibly good. And I loved the first Batman movie. Only thing that bothers me: the size of his bat ears keeps changing.

GAB: Let's discuss your work for television and motion pictures. Over the years you've penned several memorable scripts (**THE NORLISS TAPES** and **BURNT OFFERINGS** being my two particular favorites); you've also written scripts that have languished unproduced, such as the miniseries for NBC based on Peter Straub's **FLOATING DRAGON** and the third **NIGHT STALKER** film, **THE NIGHT KILLERS** (written with Richard Matheson). Of all your scripts that have been produced, which was your favorite and why, and of all your unproduced scripts, of which are you proudest and why?

WFN: In terms of sheer quality, my best produced script is probably my two-part version of Henry James' classic ghost story, **THE TURN OF THE SCREW**. This was telecast as a miniseries on two consecutive nights in April of 1974 for ABC's *Wide World of Entertainment*. It was filmed in London and starred Lynn Redgrave. I was able to extend and broaden the basic story without losing the flavor or mood. Or so the critics have told me.

My personal favorite script, however, the one I'm proudest of, is my adaptation of Peter Straub's **FLOATING DRAGON** (titled **THE BLACK SUMMER**), which was written as a two-night miniseries in 1993. Spent nine years, off and on, shopping this product around the industry, finally setting up the deal as an MGM/NBC production. Everybody loved the script, and after I'd turned in the final draft, it was greenlighted by NBC for a late '93 shoot. Then the roof fell in, as an all-new group of network execs replaced the people I'd been working with. Naturally, they killed the project. (It's a rule in Hollywood: never produce anything okayed by a former exec!)

This kind of thing always hurts. You spend months writing a script and more often than not, for one reason or another (usually having nothing to do with the quality of the work), it never gets produced. Ask Richard Matheson. Rich has a *ton* of unproduced scripts in his files. I've been well paid to write some three dozen scripts for film and television, but only fifteen of these ever reached the screen (although by Hollywood's 1-in-10 standard, that's a pretty high per-

centage).

The most famous horror project I've been associated with was the Dan Curtis production of **TRILOGY OF TERROR**. This was a Movie of the Week for ABC in 1975, based on three Matheson stories. I scripted the first two, but the shock episode that everyone still remembers, where this fierce little devil doll fiendishly attacks Karen Black in her apartment, was scripted by Matheson himself. I did get a shot at the devil doll in a sequel, **TRILOGY OF TERROR II**, which is being produced and directed by Dan Curtis in Canada for USA Cable. Should be telecast late in '96.

I could go on for hours about my experiences in the film and TV worlds, but there's no point to it. The fun (and the money) is always there, but the frustrations can be overwhelming.

In balance, I prefer writing my books and stories. They do get produced--on paper.

GAB: In a recent lecture, Kurt Vonnegut said that, in his opinion, movies and TV have all but killed the novel because modern writers are influenced not by other novelists but by film and television. Seeing as how any worthwhile literature is simply a reflection of the times in which it was written, do you see any harm in a writer being influenced by those mediums--providing, of course, that they're not the sole influence?

WFN: Well, first off, Mr. V. is wrong about movies killing the novel. People have been saying that since sound films came in back in 1928! Last year alone more than 1.5 billion books were sold in the U.S. and fiction accounted for a full half of those sales. As for influence, I think it's perfectly okay for a prose writer to be influenced by films and TV, just as long as those mediums aren't, as you say, the *sole* influence. Writers need to back up such influence with a plentitude of good reading. Now, I know many script writers who have never written a novel, or prose of any kind. They are entirely the product of the film age. But there are still plenty of active novelists. Go into any bookstore and you'll find the shelves jammed with new novels. I'm a confirmed movie "nut" and see around 70 new films a year, but that doesn't affect my prose output. In fact, at this writing, I'm working on my twelfth novel, with many more to come.

Not to worry, Mr. Vonnegut, not to worry.

GAB: Your first short story sale was *The Joy of Living* in 1954. What authors and/or

INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM F. NOLAN

books were you reading at that time, what kind of impact did they have on you, and can you still see their influence in your work today?

WFN: When I sold *The Joy of Living* I was reading a lot of science fiction: Bradbury, Sheekley, Phil Dick, Sturgeon, Heinlein, Clarke, Bester--and so on. But in terms of overall writing influences, we'd need a whole issue of the magazine in order to get them all in. I've been influenced by literally hundreds of writers--from the Westerns of Max Brand to the parodies of S.J. Perelman. The list, past and present, includes Norman Mailer, F. Scott Fitzgerald, J.D. Salinger, Dylan Thomas, Truman Capote, Chandler and Hammett, Shirley Jackson, Irwin Shaw, Ian Fleming, Steinbeck, Hemingway, and Faulkner (**THE SOUND AND THE FURY** is the best novel written in this century!). James Thurber, John Cheever, H.G. Wells, Davis Grubb, James M. Cain, Norman Corwin, Arthur Miller, James Oliver Curwood, Dean Kootz, Bob Kane, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Arthur Conan Doyle, Eudora Welty, Cornell Woolrich, A. Merritt, William Goldman, Jack Finney, and a lot of horror writers--Lovecraft & Co.--plus many more. Each of them has made--and still makes--a strong and lasting impact.

Read the dedication to **LOGAN'S RUN** and you'll see the multitude of influences on my work. I claim it as the longest dedication in any novel in history (and I kept it as short as I could).

GAB: *Many of your horror readers probably don't realize that you're an accomplished poet as well. How much has writing poetry taught you about compression in prose, and who are some of your favorite poets and why?*

WFN: I don't write many poems. One or two a year, if that. (The best are in my collection, **DARK ENCOUNTERS**.) Still, poetry has always been important in my creative life. It's the absolute distillation of emotion that intrigues me. Good poetry has an incredible intensity. I love the work of Robert Frost, with his remarkable feel for the seasons, and one of my best short stories, *And Miles to Go Before I Sleep*, is based on a famous Frost poem. Dylan Thomas is another master I greatly admire. His *Under Milk Wood* is a stunning achievement. Stephen Vincent Benét was an early love of mine in both prose and poetry. I also dig Langston Hughes, with his harsh jazz rhythms. Conrad Aiken was another early find for me; his *Punch: The Immortal Liar* is a classic. And James Dickey's *Falling in*

is a flat-out masterpiece. And, of course, Norman Corwin, the poet of radio, was, and still is, wonderfully talented.

GAB: *There's always been a singularly musical quality to your writing--for instance, I often find myself hearing echoes of Dave Brubeck's Take Five whenever I read your story, On 42nd St.--and your poems, Dirge for a Muted Trumpet and In January Rain certainly seem to support this. Does music consciously influence your prose rhythms? Do you listen to music when you work?*

WFN: Music fills an odd place in my life. I never play it separately, not even on my car radio, but I respond emotionally to it in the films I see each week. I was greatly moved by the score for the recent film **LEGENDS OF THE FALL**. Sweeping and grand--really fantastic! Ditto the music of **LAWRENCE OF ARABIA** and the **STAR WARS** trilogy--going all the way back to **THE ADVENTURES OF ROBINHOOD** and **CAPTAIN FROM CASTILE**, plus the great music from **THE WIZARD OF OZ** and so many other of those great MGM

...The reason my work carries a "musical quality" stems from the poetic approach I take with prose. It's part of my style as a writer. I have always gravitated toward writers who take this approach. So, in a sense, poetic prose is music...

--WILLIAM F. NOLAN

productions. Who can forget the score for **GONE WITH THE WIND**? Or the wonderful, pulsing score of **THE BIG COUNTRY**? Or the rousing cavalry songs in John Ford's Westerns? I've never heard writers talk about film scores, but they contain the music I best respond to and remember. I don't attend many plays, but **EVITA** just knocked me out, and I also loved **ANNIE**. I used to listen to a fair amount of classical music and jazz on LP records, but not anymore. Now I get all my music from the big screen.

GAB: *So you don't listen to it while you write?*

WFN: Oh, no, never! It would prove a crippling distraction. I know that King and Straub listen to music (King to rock, Straub to jazz, I think) as they write, but that's certainly not true in my case.

Now, the reason my work carries what you term a "musical quality" probably stems from the poetic approach I take with prose. I set up poetic rhythms in my work. It's part of

my style as a writer. I have always gravitated toward writers who take this approach--from Bradbury to Scott Fitzgerald. So, in a sense, poetic prose is music.

GAB: *Do you still drive down to your neighborhood coffee shop late at night and sit at the counter writing in longhand? Do you think a lot of modern horror writers could learn a lesson or two about clarity if they tried the longhand method once in a while?*

WFN: Yes, I still do all of my first drafts in longhand, fiction and non-fiction, at coffee shop counters (although I quit drinking coffee more than six years ago; now it's iced tea or orange juice). Not always at night though anymore--usually in the late afternoon between the lunch and dinner shifts when the place is quiet. I find it impossible to write on a computer. The page is separated from me--up on that damn screen where I can't get at it! I'm strictly a "hands-on" writer. I like to add or scratch out words, stick new sentences above the originals, and add stuff in the margins. Using a computer to write with is like a sculptor creating a statue without being allowed to touch the clay. My second drafts are done on the typewriter--the same one I've used for decades--and then my wife puts everything through her computer. I don't swear by computers--I swear at them!

GAB: *To the list of author/screenwriter/poet/television writer we can also add--illustrator! Tell us a little about how you got started drawing, and can we ever expect to see another fine chapbook like BLOOD SKY, filled with many of your wonderfully bizarre sketches?*

WFN: Art has always been in my life. I began illustrating my own juvenile stories when I started writing fiction at the age of ten back in Kansas City. Terrible art, terrible stories--but it was a beginning. Did a lot of art in high school and won several awards, including a first-place medal in a city-wide competition--for an original 12-part comic strip I wrote and drew in my school paper back in the 1940s.

GAB: *But you've done professional work in this field, right?*

WFN: Oh, yes. I was hired right out of high school to work as an artist for Hallmark Cards, and I also attended the K.C. Art Institute. Moving to California in 1947, I won another first-place prize for art at San Diego State College and then went on to establish an art studio in San Diego's Balboa Park, doing outdoor murals (for pay) and participating in local events. My one-man art show was praised by no less than the

A GRAVESIDE CHAT

director of the Fine Arts Gallery, which was extremely gratifying. During this time I was convinced that I was headed toward a career in commercial art—but when I sold a story to **IF: WORLDS OF SF** in '54 and then made a much bigger sale to **PLAYBOY** two years later, I realized that writing, not art, was the career I really wanted to pursue.

GAB: So you quit your job to write?

WFN: Yeah. I was working for the California State Department of Employment. I quit cold-turkey in 1956 and have functioned as a full-time pro ever since. And I've been lucky. For some forty years now it's been one sale right after another. My work has been in over 240 magazines and newspapers worldwide, and I've sold 99% of everything I've written in this period.

As to **BLOOD SKY**, I illustrated that small-press booklet for the fun of it, and I've done some cover art and interiors for a few other things of mine (including the four full-page illustrations for the **LOGAN TRILOGY**)—but all of this has been done at hobby level, and I doubt there'll be more. I'm not an artist, I'm a writer. It took me a while to find that out.

GAB: There's always been a strong emotional undercurrent to your work. Do you think that a lot of modern horror/dark fantasy writers shy away from displays of genuine feeling in their work and, if so, do you think it's because any moment of raw human truth will prompt cynics to label their work "soft"? (This asked during a time when it seems that every book out there has to be labeled "...on the cutting edge..." or it's not taken seriously.)

WFN: I don't know how any writer can get away from emotion in his or her work. It's a vital part of the human condition. Real people are emotional, and I try to write about real people. I'll admit that I do find a coldness in much of modern horror, a fear of pulling out the emotional stops. I don't know why, exactly. Maybe it's because, as you suggest, such writers are afraid of appearing "soft" or over-sentimental. Dash Hammett was like that, both personally and professionally. Try reading **THE GLASS KEY** and you'll see what I mean. Cold. Removed. Emotionless. But his outstanding talent pulled him through. Chandler, on the other hand, was extremely emotional. Therefore, as a writer, he's easier to like. To me, emotion is at the heart of all great fiction. Look at Molly Bloom's unbroken outpouring in James Joyce's **ULYSSES**—a full forty-five pages of pure unleashed emotion!

GAB: Your recent book from CD Publications, **NIGHT SHAPES**, collects your best

horror work over the past decade. In comparing it with your previous collection, **THINGS BEYOND MIDNIGHT** (published in 1984, and covering your best work up to then), can you discern your growth as a writer, and in what ways?

WFN: I would hope there's artistic growth evident in **NIGHT SHAPES**. I never compete with other writers (there's room for us all!) but I am always competing with William F. Nolan. I challenge myself to do better, go farther out on the creative limb, try harder, reach for a new kind of originality. As a writer, I'm always pushing the envelope, stretching my creative muscles. You must constantly move forward, break new ground, explore uncharted areas within yourself and



bring these out into the light, putting them on paper. I try to do this. So, yes, there is growth. You grow or you stagnate, and I refuse to be a stagnant writer.

GAB: Then, would you say the stories in **NIGHT SHAPES** are better than those in **THINGS BEYOND MIDNIGHT**?

WFN: No, not better, just different. I am very fond of many of the stories in **TBN**, but I've moved in new directions over the past ten years. **NIGHT SHAPES** reflects this movement.

GAB: I'd like to ask some questions of a much more personal nature now, this first being perhaps the most complex. You've made it a matter of public record that the Roman Catholic Church not only sexually destroyed your parents' marriage, but adversely affected you personally as a child, and that as a result you've completely (and some would say even vehemently) rejected

the teachings of the Church and all it stands for—yet, paradoxically, there's such a rich spirituality in your work. The question, then, is: How do you manage to reconcile such anger with the extraordinary reverence for life and inner peace that dominates much of your work, and does this reconciliation carry over into your daily life, as well?

WFN: I continue to be angry and bitter about what "Holy Mother Church" did to me and my family, but I try not to offend others with my anti-Catholic views. Therefore, I don't usually talk about this subject within the format of a public statement. But since you asked...

Basically, I believe that "God" is made up of all living things in the universe. In essence, we are all God. I am a part of God; so is every tree and plant and animal. Together, we form a universal entity, a controlling and stabilizing center. I don't believe in any traditionalist religion, be it the Roman Catholic Church or any other organized religion. I don't believe in heaven or hell; we make our own, hour to hour, day to day. I could continue at great length on this subject, but just let me sum it up by saying that I do, indeed, have a "reverence for life," and I do strive for inner peace. But it all starts within each of us. We must assume a self-governing morality, and take responsibility for our actions. I respect all living things. I try to be a decent, caring human being. Is this spirituality? You decide.

GAB: Do you believe in life after death?

WFN: Well, first of all, I don't believe in death. Nothing ever dies in this universe, it simply changes form. We have, each of us, lived many lives, quite probably, in some of them, on other planets beyond this one, and in other bodily forms. To say that Earth contains the only intelligent life is ludicrous. That's like saying that the only life in the whole of the Sahara desert resides in just one grain of sand—out of billions! That's what Earth is—only one grain of sand in the universe.

GAB: I take it, then, that you believe in UFO's?

WFN: I don't, of course, know what they are or where they come from, nor have I personally seen a UFO, but I most certainly believe in them. They are alternate life forms—and have been appearing through all of recorded history.

GAB: Your wife, Cameron, is also a professional writer. Do you find that sharing the same profession, the same love and respect of the written word, has enriched your marriage?

INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM F. NOLAN

WFN: Very much so. By March of '96 Cam and I will have been married for 26 years, and I cannot imagine life without her. I love her wholly and completely. She's also the smartest person I know, with a head full of thousands of odd (and not so odd) facts on everything under the sun. We collaborate often. She supplied the entire plot for one of my Movies of the Week, contributed heavily to **THE MARBLE ORCHARD** and to the plot (which we worked out together) of my current novel, **SHARKS NEVER SLEEP**. Cam is my best editor, my most ardent supporter, and my toughest critic. She puts everything I write through her state-of-the-art computer, keeping me modern. She comments on all my work, and I usually end up taking her advice on cuts and changes. And logic. She's great on logic. She'll read a particular page and tell me: "This isn't up to your standard. You can do better." And she's right 90% of the time.

GAB: I'll lighten things up for this last batch. Let's say, hypothetically, that some of the people reading this interview in **DEATHREALM** might not be as familiar with your work as I am. If one of these people were to ask you, dead-bang, to name the ten individual pieces of work that best present and define what you as a writer are all about, what would they be, and why?

WFN: My best novel, without question, is my latest, **THE MARBLE ORCHARD**, from St. Martin's Press. It contains what I might call a "depth of humanity" that makes it stand out among my novels. I feel that in many ways this one transcends the mystery genre and moves into mainstream fiction. We'll have to see if the critics and readers agree.

As to the other nine...how can I choose among so many literary children? But I'll take a shot at it.

Best collection: either **NIGHT SHAPES** or **LOGAN: A TRILOGY**. Best short story: maybe *Lonely Train A' Comin'* or *The Yard or Dead Call or The Giant Man*. I really don't know. Best non-fiction: I'll name my bio, **HAMMETT: A LIFE AT THE EDGE**, but I received my best critical notices (across-the-board raves) for **THE BLACK MASK BOYS**. Best essay: *Red Roses in the Rain*, my ultimate tribute to auto racing. Best poem: *Hemingway: Now Never There* (selected as lead verse in the very literary **PRAIRIE SCHOONER**). Hey, we're past nine already, so I'll shut up.

GAB: Would you describe, in as little or much detail as you'd like, a typical workday for William F. Nolan?

WFN: There is no typical Nolan work day—or night, for that matter. I have no set time to get up in the morning and no set writing schedule. Nothing is planned. Scheduled, disciplined work habits have never appealed to me. I'm the boss; I make the rules. All that matters is, did that story or article or book get written in a reasonable time? I get the pages out. I meet my deadlines. People want to know if I work on holidays. Sure I do—because every day in my life is a holiday. I happen to have the best job in the world. Not to write is not to breathe.

GAB: A lot of professional writers get so caught up in the business end of things that it begins to overshadow—if not outright poison—their reasons for wanting to be a writer in the first place. So, tell us: Is it still as much fun for you now as it was back in 1954? What advice would you give to up-and-

coming writers as to how they can keep their love for their craft alive when the business end begins to loom a little too large?

WFN: Advice? Write only what excites you. Never bore yourself on paper or you'll bore your readers. Develop a thick skin; you'll always get rejections, all through your career—and certain critics will blast you in print. This can hurt. (The one bad review is the one you remember.) Believe in yourself, in your individual talent (providing, of course, that you possess such talent, as only time, and lots of hard work at the keys, will tell). Never let business replace your inner sense of what to write. If the work is good the money will come.

Is writing as much fun for me today as it was in 1954 when I made that first sale? You already know the answer to that. If it wasn't so much damned fun I wouldn't still be doing it all these years later. I wake up excited about life every morning, looking forward to the new words, new books, new stories. If it isn't that way for you, you're in the wrong profession.

GAB: To close: let's pretend that you're a character from *Edgar Lee Masters' SPOON RIVER ANTHOLOGY*: If you could sum up your philosophy toward both your life and your craft in a few sentences, what would they be?

WFN: I'm a professional entertainer. I try to write stories, both true and fictional, that people will enjoy. I have no profound messages to pass along to the multitudes. I don't dance, sing, juggle, or play a musical instrument. I tell stories. Isn't that enough?

GAB: Thank you very much, William F. Nolan.

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The View from The Castle Tower

by billie sue mosiman

WE ARE LOOKING at tax time soon. Writers, by and large, are timid about taking deductions for their writing expenses. Especially writers who are just starting out and haven't made any sales or those who have just sold a few stories or a first novel.

Well, I'm here to harangue you. Deduct, deduct, deduct. Most accountants don't understand the tax laws concerning writers, so if you look for one, first ask your writer friends who they use and get a recommendation. If you do your taxes yourself, as I did for many years, just follow the directions in your tax booklet and fill out Schedule C, even if you show a loss. You're allowed to take a loss three years out of five and you're entitled to deduct for a home office if you have one. Naturally your office should be a real office used only for your writing business. You would want to be able to show the tax man where you work if you were ever audited. He wouldn't look fondly on a room where you have a zebra-skin pool table and a bar with skull glasses set up with the computer or typewriter over in one corner on a wood crate. Be cool.

Tax deductions are there for you to claim when appropriate. If you write to sell and not as a hobby, claim your losses if you have them. If you've spent more than a couple hundred dollars a year trying to sell your work then you should be filling out Schedule C and putting in your claim for those deductions whether you earned anything or not. We too often let our own government intimidate us with the fear of an audit. If you have your receipts and a real office in your home, why be afraid? All other business people, even those showing a loss—especially those showing a loss—fill out their tax forms and put in for their

deductions. Since we are legitimate business people, don't be intimidated into not claiming your expenses for the year. Get out those forms and go at it.

THE HOTTEST TOPIC around these days is the Internet. The USA Network has a show called C/Net Central devoted to it. CNN regularly does updates on what's happening on the Internet. Nearly every network and cable channel has its own Web page. Everyone from the preschooler to Vice President Gore surfs the Net.



What's so hot about calling out on your modem and hooking into the World Wide Web? Well, for one thing if you're at all interested in the world itself, you'll be fascinated by the Internet. Any society you'd like to join has a sign-up page on the Net. Are you an orchid enthusiast? (I am.) You can find links to orchid shops, outlets, malls, and individual orchid growers willing to share their experience and sell off overstock. How about jewelry? Do you hunger for gold and gems? Get on a search machine (that's what they call a page where you can search for 'hits' on a keyword) and type

in 'gems' and a whole world of links opens up for you to track down that elusive Burma ruby you've always coveted. Trying to research dangerous personalities and psychotics? Type in 'abnormal psychology' and see what moldy secrets you can turn up.

What about horror? Are you in for a treat. At the end of this column I'll list a whole list of URLs (that's Internet addresses) where horror is not only alive and well, but it's kicking ass.

You don't even have to know all these tech terms to enjoy skimming around the Internet. Most pay services have an Internet connection that makes it simple and easy to go out investigating. Schools are using the Internet for teaching, colleges are offering credited courses through the Internet, organizations such as Horror Writers Association have their brochure on-line that you can download, fill out, and join.

The newest rage on the Internet is the proliferation of Home Pages. These are pages created by individuals that sometimes sport their photos, hobbies, and links to other home pages they like. The woodworker, musician, and gymnast has a Home Page as well as the novelist. There are literally thousands of these pages on the Web that provide a captivating window into the soul of the world.

The only trouble with surfing the Internet is how it can become addictive and eat up hours of your time before you know it. Some Internet providers (companies in existence solely for subscribers to access the Internet) give you hundreds of free hours a month for a basic fee and once you're immersed in following links on the Net, you'll need those hours.

So, trust me, get yourself an account and get out there to surf the World Wide Net. Not since the availability of the personal computer has

there come along something so intriguing and informative as easy, cheap access from the comfort of your home to people and groups around the globe. Hey, even **DEATHREALM** has a Home Page. You'll certainly want to check it out for yourself.

I DON'T SUPPOSE this column would be worth a damn if it didn't create a little controversy, and it seems to have done that if we go by the recent letters sent to Ye Editor. I'll do my best to keep that kind of racket going because...well, it's fun, don't you think? Write in whether you agree or disagree, we don't care, and I'm always ready to take into consideration your views. Not that it will change what I think—it won't—but I don't mind hearing the other side. If I tell you not to trash your fellow writers in print reviews and you think you should, why go ahead, enjoy yourself to the fullest, be my guest, Bubba. If you think you shouldn't take your deduc-

tions for taxes or you think the Internet stinks, don't hold back, scream and holler. If it gets your blood moving, it has to be good for you. Probably.

Now for a rec on a video rental you just have to check out. Go find **SHALLOW GRAVE**, a British film with a plot that reminded me a little of Scott Smith's **A SIMPLE PLAN**. If this one doesn't raise the hairs on the back of your neck, you're dead.

Keep them cards and letters rolling in, ladies and gents, claim your deductions, and until next time, sign up with an Internet provider and surf down the cold stone halls to these horror sites. While you're at it, check out my Home Page and read the first chapter of my latest scare tome.

DEATHREALM Home Page:

<http://www.greyware.com/authors/LWE/realm.htm>

Horror Writers Association:

<http://www.horror.org/HWA>

Horror Videos Galore:

<http://www.cat.pdx.edu/~caseyh/horror/theater/index.html>

My Home Page:

<http://www.cat.pdx.edu/~caseyh/horror/author/mosiman.html>

Arnen's Arbor Vitae:

<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/%7Emikea/arbor1.html>

Keli's Link to Horror:

<http://users.aol.com/sandman66/horror.html>

The Horror List:

<http://copper.ucs.indiana.edu/%7Ershpard/horror.html>

Dr. Casey's Cabinet of Horror:

<http://www.cat.pdx.edu/%7Ecaseyh/horror/index.html>

Hammer House of Horror:

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Saliva, Sunburn & The Scum of the Earth

By Michael Ryan Zimmerman

1.

THE WOMAN in the surf cried "CRAB!" and started to hop and splash. She was a tomato, a real looker in a flowered bikini, and her yelps and bounces were most welcome to me. But her face wore pain and that frantic fear you get when something in the murky undertow is chewing your body and you can't see it. Tyrannosaurus sea monsters, or great white sharks in three feet of water, ten feet from the shore.

She barked "Crab! Crab!" into shallow waves as her buff beau laughed and grabbed her arm. "It's still got me!" she said, holding her beau's shoulder for balance. Her foot cleared the water. The crab was an algae-snot colored syringe sticking out from between her big and second toes.

Some onlookers simultaneously screamed. Acidic sunbeams hit my shoulders as I made my way out of the water just when the woman began to vomit into it.

2.

THAT HAPPENED IN late May. Me, Travis, I first came to the beach in April. Unemployed, washed up at twenty-four. I didn't really know how I ended up there. Perhaps it was all those kids I knew who disappeared with their families for weeks, saying only, "We're going to the beach," with a generous amount of me-and-not-you hurrah. So it *became* something. The beach. The boardwalk. What a glorious sight for me—even in the relative deadness of April—when I arrived at the bus station, last cash in my pocket. The heavy-traffic smoothness of the boards. The stale popcorn and pizza sauce mixing with the sweet warmth of cut plywood and ozone power tools as vendors prepared for the season. Such a welcome and giddy smell. It couldn't get any better, couldn't promise more, couldn't get me farther away from the wide open desolation of the dead crops and scurried cows. The poisonous blue piles of dung, alive and wormy...that's what the beach was, it was *away*. Away from so much. From poisonous dirt. From everything bad that was hollowing me out like a medical school cadaver. Tasting me, liking me, then finishing me.

The salt air filled my lungs that day in April, and I smiled. Young, free, light shoulders. I immediately blew ten bucks on skeeball. Winning that bouncing green superball was better than masturbation.

3.

THE JOB SEEMED like gravy to me even though money was as harsh a reality as the memory of the decayed animals. I rented a room above a trendy bar called Sunburn's. The hardwood place was on the boardwalk right in the middle of the pier amusements. Prime real estate popular with the trimmed young ones on summer break listening to the latest Chili Pepper offering. Sunburn's was owned by Sonny Burns, thus the clever name. Sonny was fifty, still blond, getting portly, and had over a dozen sources of income up and down the boards—the bar and the rooms on the second and third floors just a sampling. A week after renting to me, he stopped me outside the bar as the sun was setting.

"You been wandering around here like a phantom, kid. You need a job?"

I stared. The words were goofy in my ears.

"Well?" Sonny was staring.

I shrugged at him like it was a weapon. "I guess I do."

"Right," Sonny nodded. "Can you talk?"

I nodded.

"Then let me hear you."

"I can talk."

Sonny smirked. "Okay then."

4.

SONNY PUT ME behind the counter of one of his amusement stands, the one where people threw darts at balloons for plastic baseball team beer mugs. "The Phils, O's, and Yanks are real popular," said Sonny. "Kids love 'em. Get drunk at Sunburn's, throw darts, then go out to the pier and throw darts so they have a bigger mug to get more drunk. Beautiful. Just beautiful. I love fucking college boys."

I didn't flinch at the wordplay, but Sonny drew several stares from passersby. I looked at his tan knobby knees and had a flash of a cow sidestepping on rickety legs and falling in the mud. Dead. Moo.

I was employed.

By late May, when the woman pulled the syringe out of the surf and closed the water for a month, the boardwalk was hopping and I was a very busy man after dark.

5.

HER NAME WAS Carly. She worked the stand next to mine where people threw footballs through plywood for stuffed animals. Carly was cuteness beyond third

dimension, blond hair smooth as pristine motor oil, brown eyes out of nude pictures, paste up body parts under white t-shirts and nylon shorts. Never tights, like some of the other tomatoes walking the boards with beaus. She alternately put her hair in a tail, or let it hang, or braided it down the back. Innocence, sultriness, depending on her mood, her day, her beauty. We talked when things were slow. We became friends. She was living at the beach for the summer with three of her friends. I came to want her. I fingered darts when jocks holding their privates tried to sink footballs and win, tried to pick her up and put her youth through their motel walls with their hips.

"You're so old," she told me one night soon after we met. She sat injun style towards me, and I leaned cool-like and smiled. "But you don't act it," she said.

"I guess I don't know how," I replied.

She laughed. We paused in each other's eyes.

"How old are you?" I asked.

"Eighteen." Her voice was soft, softer than the bleats and growls and hayseed bitchings I was used to. Her eyes were a chocolate amusement park.

"Eighteen," I repeated.

"Legal," she said with eyebrow wiggles.

6.

ON MY MEAL break one random night I went for fries as I always do—good, good french fries on the boardwalk. Fries, vinegar, aftertaste. All I ate. Ever.

Then, out of the crowd came a nigger flying into people like a surprise scream.

"Motherfucker!" he roared, regaining balance and driving back the way he came on legs like truck cylinders. The crowd simultaneously parted and coagulated into a circle for the show. The black's fists were already mashing the face of a white jock, not unlike the scum who tried to pick up Carly all the time. Blood roped up each time the black's fist swung. Then two more white jocks jumped the black, one pulling him up, the other squeezing his prickly pear like he was breaking bread. Three more blacks waded in, adding another white or two. Blood slicked limbs and every guy's girlfriends screeched her tonsils to stone.

Dad always warned me about the niggers. Told me, don't be racist. That's ignorant. Just watch out for them. So I did, even though it was the jocks I couldn't

stand. Seeing those white faces getting their asses stomped helped. All the scum in the world should be skimmed into a shit bucket where it could eat itself to death. Jocks, niggers, fags, longhairs. Dad always warned me...oh, enough about that. I ate my fucking fries and went back to my stand. Carly asked what happened, but I didn't tell. She invited me to the beach the next day with her roommates and I said yes.

7.

CARLY DIDN'T KNOW that much about me. She knew I was from a farming family. She didn't know why I was at the beach, or that all the cows died and the grass turned to stain. She didn't know about my parents or my brother. She didn't know what a shit-brown world we lived in, or how the folds of her brain could iron out at any time and leave her dead where she stood. She didn't know the growling animal anger behind the eyes of each male she flirted with at her stand, how the only thing separating their nethers were shorts and a plywood vending stand. Didn't know what scum they were.

How could I tell her? How abnormal would I sound? I'm not that naive.

I kept my mouth shut and went to the beach. It helped. The day was great, and even though the water was still closed and clogged with the blistered waste of hospital dead, the sand was crowded. A baking desert mob of fat people, smearing basting oil on their brown limbs, cool beyond cool behind their mirrored shades. Yet all of them fat and foldy, with gray hairs spun like webs across their chests and heads. There were tomatoes, of course, and their buff beaus, but I realized (with great pride at my reasoning power) that if you wanted to see what people really looked like, you came to the beach at high heat. Turgid, sweaty, cooking creatures.

Carly and her girlfriends were great, though, and I was a sudden stud. They all wore bikinis, rightfully so, and I spread my bath towel gingerly and at a polite distance.

There were introductions, but I didn't catch any of their names. My head was heating up. Carly sat on the girls' blanket and began rubbing heavy duty cream on her limbs. "Working on a great base tan," she said with a wink. "Want some?"

I shook my head no, and they said I was crazy. "Yep," I replied. "I've worked outside all my life. It really doesn't bother me."

"He's a weird one, Carly," said one of the friends. I shrugged and everybody



laughed and settled greased and ready into their pans. Time bulldozed into us. I feel asleep, smelling bacon and burning hard.

8.

CARLY'S GASP, AND "Oh my God," woke me to sitting. Blinking and sunblind. There was a scream from the right, but all I could make out were the bikinis of the girls, their hands shielding their eyes, their armpits stubble. And to my surprise, four guys sitting up around us like a courting fence.

Then I could see what was what, dimly. A bearded longhair was trucking along the sand towards the boards with a sizeable beach bag. Another man was in pursuit, his flab and pregnancy stretch marks glowing like wet food.

"That guy stole that bag," said a Carly friend.

"Yo, man, that fat guy'll never catch up," said one of the new guys.

Christ, I nearly belched. A jock. They all were. I laid back down and listened to their low grunts and snickers as the bag thief was brought down and gutted by police. I could smell the entrails, freshly butchered and hanging from the upper loft of the slaughter barn. Entrails turned black and sour, meat turned insectile. I swallowed.

"Oh man, they beat the shit out of him! Look!"

So much glee.

"Good morning," came Carly's voice. She was smiling at me, warm and aglow. Her lightly toasted breasts were buttered, and the undone lines near bikini fabric were bright as neon. "You slept for a while."

"Burned to a crisp, man," said one of the guys. He poked my arm and left a white spot.

"These are our friends from home," said Carly. Names flew at me like foam-rabid bats and I ignored them. "Feel like coming to a party tonight?"

"Kick back with some brews, shake off the sand," said the closest, poking jock.

"Sure," I said, shrugging. I'd drank before.

"Great," said Carly, smiling at me so sweet. But the jock caught her eye, and she looked away from me, then back again. "Well...I really want you to come, but I was wondering if you could do us all a favor?"

I shrugged. "What?"

"Well...none of us are old enough to get beer."

So that was it. Gullible Bovine. Dead. Moo.

After saying yes, I rolled onto my stomach to douse my back in pain, to free my mind of suspicions and set-ups and the unfriendly feelings. The happiness and relieved giggling on the blankets around me was loud, but the remaining smell of the boardwalk arrest kept cow in my nose, and flame in my eyes.

What was in me--the toxic residual from the farm--had come to life like a radiator. The sun had hold of me, and from that moment I would not sleep for a whole summer.

9.

MY FIRST NIGHT off. The party was a happening affair. We rolled the keg in at sunset, everybody was freshly fed and showered, primed for cranked tunes and premarital sex. I sat normally, slowly drinking, speaking only when spoken to. The jocks were drinking fast, taking as many females with them as they could. Drinking games with dice and cards. What it is, my main man. What it was, what it shall be. Carly alternated between the games and me and her friends. Some of them tried to get information out of me, and I told them about the farm, and that my parents simply lost it and I wasn't real friendly with the family anymore. They left me alone after that except for peepee-caca giggle jokes and stuff. Most of them were getting really drunk. Carly had five and a half cups of beer.

I wandered out onto their balcony into a frighteningly cold breeze. My sunburn was cashing in. Sweat, heat, chills. Behind me, music pumped, I sipped beer. Across the street a guy and a girl were having a drunken argument three stories up on their balcony. Who was he fucking on the side? Someone named Andrea. He told her to shut her cunt mouth and smacked her hard across the face. Her drink went plummeting to the sidewalk. I licked sweat from my upper lip and went back inside.

"What are you doing out there?" asked Carly, suddenly in front of me.

"Nothing."

"God, you're steaming."

I held up my forearm. It looked as if I'd just stepped out of a hot shower--wet wisps were coming off my skin. "My sunburn," I replied.

"Wow, man," said one jock, and for

a moment I thought he had his hand down the front of one of the random Carlyfriends' shorts. He was only squeezing her arm. "You're evaporating."

"That is so weird," Carly touched my arm. "You're hot. You want some lotion?"

"Drink, man. You'll never feel it."

"No more beer." I shook my head, but it was woozy then, and I put my cup down. My hands were blurry. My eyes filled with saltwater. My mouth dripped. I was paralyzed in a rage, livid at everything, livid, livid, boiling, bloody, *livid and cancerous, cramping up and salivating and wanting to suck zits from teen throats, steaming...FLESH STRETCHING...I had no idea what it was other than PURE, INNER BODY ROT AND RAGE.*

"FUCK!"

That word was out of my mouth and aimed at the jock with his hand shoved deep up the random Carlyfriend. But I remember not wanting them to have sex. I wanted him to leave her alone.

That word, coming from someplace deep, made Carly step back from me.

But I couldn't worry about that because the stuff was coming up hard, and I roared to the bathroom and launched into the bowl. I looked at the vomit and the things in it and slammed the door before anyone could come watch. The jocks were cheering. The girls were mumbling, one about me cleaning my own mess. I launched harder. Again.

"Are you all right?" Carly's voice.

Why couldn't we make love on the beach, on a soft blanket, rough and tumble, why oh why...I was so sick now, God these good things would never happen...why couldn't I....

...just be with her once....

I heaved again. Licked my teeth and spit.

"Travis, let me in."

Oh Carly.

"I'm okay," I managed. But I wasn't.

I belched acid, and my bowels were starting to drop. I was making noises I couldn't control. I had to get out of there. My focus returned and I was incredibly cold. Sweat dripped into the toilet bowl, and yes since I could focus, I focused on that.

My discharge. It came slowly to a stop, thick and foamy from the beer I consumed. But I'd seen discharge like this before. Back on the farm. From my father, my mother, my brother. The same thick-

ness, the same movement, the same deep red wine color. So red it was almost purple. So purple it was almost blue. Pieces of me were coagulating right in front of me.

Thankfully, it went down without a fight. In fact, the discharge's swirl and gurgle to the sewer was the most peaceful thing I'd seen in weeks.

My God, the scum of the earth was coming out of me.

10.

CARLY WALKED ME the six blocks down the boards to my place. I was soaked with sweat and freezing, but my stomach was stable. My lower intestines were a different story. I had to stop and fake nausea several times so I wouldn't soil my pants.

"God, you're a ncess," said Carly. "I didn't even drink anything."

"This isn't booze sick. You're sick sick. God, you're so clammy."

"Steam me."

"Very funny. What I'm going to do is put you to bed."

I sighed melodramatically. Carly pushed me along by the arm, saying, "Come on, sickopath," and I delighted in the expressions of passersby who thought we were lovers.

11.

CARLY SAW ME to my door, and that was fine. I couldn't have asked for more. I went to the toilet for a long time, flushing what felt like thick worms coming out of me. I got naked. I wanted to masturbate but the fever turned me into chewing gum.

My night was spent in the blistering, oven-like cold of my room, shivering, sweating, grabbing and kicking covers a thousand times. Watching the manic spin of my ceiling fan as Sunburn's pulsed to last call beneath me. Wondering how much more scum this earth could pump out. The jocks, the longhairs, the niggers, the men. Men taking women, grabbing money, beating others. So territorial. Women as territory, land, a possession. Men out on the town were on expansion conquests. Fights, rapes, robberies, violence of all kinds were battles. All these conquering men I describe are the scum. The women are their farms, where they dump their toxic waste.

They were out there.

To prove it, out my window a car backfired six times in a row, and sirens

wailed.

12.

ON MY WAY to work the next day, I ran into Sonny Burns. My skull thunder-bellowed, my insides popped like cooking spaghetti sauce. Outwardly, I was ripe. My hair drooled. My earwax caked down the sides of my neck. My butt burned *habanero*.

"Got some sun, didja," Sonny said. "Heard you tossing dinner last night."

I nodded.

"I don't care if you're hungover. No miscounts in the till."

I nodded again.

"Shave once in a while, rugrat," he growled. I stared dumbly. One of my eyelids spasmed. "Are you dead? Speak."

"Woof."

"Smartass shitforbrains slacker. Get away from me."

A pleasure. One of two I had that day.

...A sextet of jocks stumbled by us, woo-woosing and belching for Carly to ditch the wimp and let her nipples roam free in their mouths. Fifty more boards brought us to a longhair lounging on a porch. He was receiving fellatio from a scrawny ribcage and greasy hair...

The other was waiting for me at her game stand catering to some post-dinner kids who tossed footballs like they ate: hard, fast, and off-target.

"What are you doing up?" Carly asked after the kids moved off. Hands were on hips. Eyes drilling diamonds. "You look terrible."

I nodded.

"Look at that sunburn, Travis. What kind of farm boy are you?"

I smiled. "I'm fair skinned."

"Doesn't it hurt?"

I nodded. "Chills still. S'okay. I'm not sick anymore." But the tops of my feet had looked blistery as bubble wrap this morning, and were as hot as a barroom lighter to the touch. Each step was sandpaper. But Carly would never know this. Nor would she know the agony burning inside me. A lump. A networking furnace slowly sending rivulets of bloody lava through my system. Streams of clumping flame. Inner compost. Toxins.

I think the sunburn activated them

inside me the same way it did my father, mother, and brother. And all the livestock as well. Scum of the earth.

But Carly would never know this.

"I feel fine."

"You're such a maniac." She chuckled and shook her head. "You don't look fine."

Her smile was a precious vision. Carly, super sweet. She let me buy her french fries later. So many smiles. We talked. I was in love with her.

In love with her. You know what that does to your insides.

I was a reactor.

13.

CARLY AND I walked together towards her place after I accepted her offer of keg dregs. At midnight, the boardwalk became a transplanted ghetto, interspersed with drunk rich jocks and vacationing teenagers. Feeding the hunger for anger, violence, depravity. Territoriality. Catcalls from nigger groups loitering on their car hoods bathed in drugs. Mewls from their prostitutes wondering what the whitebread virgin's pussy tastes like. Carly and I walking through them in resolute silence, riding a bubble atop the scum pond. But there was more. A sextet of jocks stumbled by us, woowoosing and belching for Carly to ditch the wimp and let her nipples roam free in their mouths. Spilling beer, breathing attic pizza and their personal semen. Fifty more boards brought us to a longhair lounging on a porch. He was receiving fellatio from a scrawny ribcage and greasy hair.

"Oh my God," whispered Carly, and she turned her face to my shoulder. I walked us faster, and the longhair's laughter echoed behind us like sick coughs.

A minute later, when in the clear, Carly chuckled. "I can't believe we just saw that."

"Scum," I replied.

"That girl was giving him head in the middle of the boardwalk! Oh my God. The girls are not going to believe this. That was so sick!"

Yet she was laughing. How could she be in such a good mood? When she took my hand all the scum went away instantly, behind a lead curtain not even distant sucking sounds could penetrate.

"Your skin is so hot," she said in wonder. "I don't get it. It's way too warm."

"I drank some toxic waste," I re-



plied.

She chuckled. "You're so weird." She didn't believe me. We walked on. But I wanted to say, Carly, I really did drink toxic waste.

I really, really, really did.

14.

DAYS LATER.

It was getting hotter as the summer intensified. Women lost more and more fabric, became naked and steamier in their butt-thong nakedness. The men were fat, drunk, and rude. The salt air and pizza, thick and lumpy as carpet. Cigarette butts, seagull loads, peeling flesh. Lights, screams, watch the tram car please. At night the whores came out and took the losers off the boards for spare cash and drugs. I was offered syringes and pipes on my way home, probably fresh from the surf. The other day a dead shark washed up on the beach. There was a stabbing, white into black. A woman from France was raped under the boardwalk by three unidentified teenagers with shaved heads and sunglasses. The police, leaning on their bikes and against light poles, suffered. The heat soaked through their white shirts and made the shades slide down their noses. I watched them watch nothing. Fights broke out and they would walk over and start throwing people, twisting them into automatically trained shapes of pain. Women were sent to the wood face-first, screaming that their boyfriends were jumped. Racist pigs, they screamed. Every night it was something different over my french fries.

One night I was returning to my stand after dinner when a charbroiled man, zit-faced and wheezing, began shooting. The chase had been on for some time, apparently, and now they had him snagged on the boardwalk, heroes in front of the crowd. A gun went off, and a cop howled about his kneecap. Three other cops brought the gunman down with efficiency, then. Big bullets with stopping power. His chest became pepperoni pizza. I never saw so many people want to leave the boardwalk. Fist fights and racial slurs were a curiosity, but the surreality of death was too much for them. The screams, the blood, the sulfur smoke and powdergrains. Too much.

The police closed the boards for the night, but everyone came back the next night, tanned, rested, and ready to suck the earth once more. The jocks, the niggers,

the longhairs. Why were they scum? Why were they not simply 'other human beings?' Because they got in my way. They made-me sweat and sting. My sunburn kicked up exponential notches when they high-fived after untangling wives' bikini tops. When they pulled knives on the husbands.

And Carly. They all wanted Carly. Catcalls, whistles, tongues between two fingers. She took it so well. She'd laugh and shrug it away. But sometimes she got closer than I could take to these dragons. I found to my disgust that I was as territorial as any of them. But they were hunters; I was settled. Once, after ten minutes flirting over the counter with a flattopped barber case, her nipples got hard.

I turned away and squeezed back the pulse of blue bile thick in my throat. Again, for the first time since I got sick, my arms began to steam. The fumes smelled like burning plastic, and I had to leap over my stand and head for the beach using french fries as an excuse. But dinner was the last thing in my cantalouping brain. I rolled vomiting in the surf for half an hour, letting the waves kick me, soak me through. Beaten, gargling, I remembered the latest report, the great newsworthy day count. How long until the surf would be open? Not in the foreseeable future, they said. High levels of preservatives and pesticides and diseases and cures. Barges feeding waves, insatiable waves and uncaring sun worshippers who didn't care how thick the water became so long as their bellies were boards and their crotch stubble smooth. Smooth and waiting for the stars. Wanting to eventually become territory.

So I squirmed there in the sand, the surf pounding, the brine like saliva. Drying salt crusted my eyes. I felt seasoning entering my pores. Fecal croutons entering my mouth. Needles acupuncture my blisters. My own seaweedy discharge washing over me repeatedly.

Finally my stomach settled, and the night air began to soothe my skin in the hot spit. I thought of beaming shots of Godlight and Carly silhouetted naked across my vision, shimmering like a willing wave, preparing to cry orgasms into my shoulder.

I began to thirst.

Thirst hard.

My belly was empty. My throat parched. Waves slugged me, submerged me and dug me deep into the sand.

So thirsty.

So I took the shining sea into my

mouth and drank. It was poison, it was mucous, saliva, and it fit perfectly into the bowl of waste porridge I was becoming.

15.

MY SUNBURN GOT worse. Interior became exterior. Days flustered by. I never slept. Nights were spent on the boardwalk viewing the show. I saw it all. Fights, drugs, prostitution, apathy. What else could I do? I was burning up. I tossed and back blisters flooded my sheets with goo. I turned and hair came out, sticking to the pillow. No sleep meant walking the pier through dawn and the noon. Then work. I continued to burn. The heat and misery made people mere violent. Boardwalk bullshit padded the police blotter.

At work, Carly made me oblivious to it. A zombie to serve her. But at quitting time that usually ended, besides the occasional walk home with her.

I realized I had incredibly fair skin tight over my bones, and that first good burn in May brought the furnace to life in me. I got angry more and more at simple existence. At the heat, at the crowds. I could feel my butt bones on the boardwalk benches as I sat and ate my fucking french fries with vinegar. French fries were all I ate, though sometimes I enjoyed grape pop tarts.

With fucking frosting.

Several nights later, after closing, Carly and I were walking the beach under a full moon. The beams melted onto the water like milk, calmly, easily. There was no steam under the moon. The most settling moment I'd had in weeks, though Carly's presence kept my belly simmering like an acid bath. We talked extensively of life's ambitions.

I had none. She didn't think this strange.

We climbed a lifeguard stand and sat for a while soaking up the heartbeat of the waves and the flat soda feel of the breeze. The words flowed softly from us, coupling with the fatigue of the night taking guff from scum. Our hands found each other, squirmed home, and settled between us like passed-out pets.

"You're so warm," she whispered, tightening her grip. "I think you're hotblooded."

"I'm getting a lot of sun."

"God, I sleep most of the day. I haven't had a good day on the beach in two weeks. I'm place as a ghost, it's disgusting."

"You're beautiful."

She chuckled. "Yeah, right."

"I watch you every night, Carly. I see you move, smiling at the scum. I compare you to them, and there's nothing in them worth saving. But you're golden, you've got a light on you. It's incredible and I'm blessed by God to be able to be next to you night after night."

In the moon's phosphorescence, I could see how her mouth had gradually dropped at my words.

"You talk," she said suddenly.

On that, we enjoyed a good dose of sugar-coated laughter. The comfort was phenomenal, and she was all over it, her curiosity like a late night candy craving.

"So what's your story, Travis? You're so quiet all the time a girl doesn't know what to think."

"So don't think." I said with a smile.

"Oh, knock that off. Everyone likes to talk, even if they're quiet. Talk to me. Tell me about your family."

I didn't think I let on any emotion. But she read something hard in my face, as if she overstepped a boundary. Suddenly she was subdued.

"I'm sorry. I got carried away. You told me you don't talk to them. I'll shut up now."

She let go of my hand.

"It's okay, Carly."

"I'm sorry."

I smiled. "I said it's okay. We can talk about it. It's not taboo."

She wasn't stepping anywhere now without being guided first. So I took her hand again. And took her on my journey.

"There was a small problem," I began. Slowly. This wasn't easy to get out, and I wasn't sure I wanted it out at all. But Carly was right there waiting to absorb it. So: "My dad lost the farm, and I couldn't stay there anymore. There was some... ugliness. Drinking at first. Then fights. When it became obvious what was going on, there were all out brawls. But they were caused by the disease. Had to be. Our family was close before that."

"Before what?"

I sighed hairdryer heat. The memories hurt. "Men were dumping barrels on my dad's property, in the fields, and in the water supply. All the cattle died. All the crops died. Then my..." I stopped before my cracking voice betrayed me. I cleared my throat. "Everything eventually died."

"Your parents?" Carly's eyes were wide and moist, her hand clammy in mine. She clearly didn't want to ask the question.

"Yeah," I replied. "They died. The poison was in the water. It killed them. My brother too."

"Oh my God."

Visions of purple vomit and starved ribs hit me then, hard and hot. Clumps of hair in my hands. Torrential anger. Incredible heat. All the symptoms.

"What was it?" Carly asked.

"The poison? I don't know. Chemicals. Cancers. That's why I get such a big kick out of medical waste in the surf. It's so tame compared to what I've seen."

A large wave washed against the base of the lifeguard chair in reply.

"And these people dumping toxic waste... they killed--"

"Yes,"

Carly. My whole family. Mom, Dad, my brother Charlie. All the livestock."

I saw the rickety legs snapping under the raw, dead meat of the cows. Trying to help them, and them in turn sneezing tubercular snot all over me.

"So," she ventured carefully, "are... are you all right?"

I laughed. Fuck NO.

But: "I'm still here, right?" I replied, the sudden disgust at her purity walloping me like a roaring bus. I squeezed her hand tighter, but her limb was dead in my grasp. Her pure heart, mind, and body wanted to know that I was clean. Clean. Healthy. Aglow. Because you can never be too careful these days. "Right?" I repeated.

"Yeah, but Travis..."

Her words burrowed, tunneling me out, leaving scorched earth. Damn it, I was losing her! The surf slammed into the beach in front of us, pounding my temples, my core. I was intensifying, a belch of flame climbing my esophagus. I swallowed and swallowed, trying helplessly to stop

burning. Searing. Dying. I was dying slowly. All the symptoms. All the death threats. God damn you, Carly, take me the way I am, I wanted to howl. Please....

But I knew it was useless, and this was our last hurrah. The demand of her stare was too much, a ride of moisture and flame that was about to drop me off.

"Travis..."

"What?"

"Are you sick? I need to know. Are you?"

I had no outward reaction. You can understand what I was feeling inside.

"Travis..."

"Yeah," I finally replied. "Yeah, Carly, yeah. I drank the water. I drank the fucking water, so I'm sick."

"God," she mumbled softly. Every-

thing hard and demanding in her had suddenly peeled away. I could see the softness, the beauty of her as she stared out onto the water. She'd cared. At that moment I knew she'd cared about me in some small way beyond friendly compassion. So wonderful. It was the most complete I'd ever felt.

"It's not fair," she whispered.

"Tell me about it." I rested my head back and tried to pick out stars through the moon glare. Smelling the delicate wisps of her shampoo and perfume. So sweet, that smell.

Then I smelled beer breath. Felt it on my cheek as hot and rampant as sewage.

"Got some blow, dude?"

The two of us sat up hard, my temperature blasting like a grenade.

Some jock-looking guy had climbed the back of the lifeguard chair and was right on top of us. Stinking, muscular, and drunk. Another one hovered on the sand a few feet away. Tanktops, short hair, bare feet.

Drunk jocks. God.

"Come on, man," he repeated, tap-



ping a large ring on the wood. "Got some blow?"

"What?" I asked stupidly. At first I didn't know what he meant, but since then I've learned what cocaine is.

"Go away," replied Carly. "We don't have any."

"Aw, come on," he slurred, tapping the ring. Then he looked at her—I could physically see his eyes focus on her face and chest. "Damn, babe, you're sweet. Anyone ever tell you that? Wow. Come with us and help find some blow."

"I don't think you'd like that," she said. She gestured at me. "He's a cop." "Bullshit, whore."

"Don't talk to her like that," I said. Adrenaline was like gasoline in me.

The jack was laced, but leveled a good stare at me. "What're you gonna do, pisser? You a cop? You gonna badge me?"

"Yo, man," mumbled Jack Two from behind him. "Let's go someplace where they *do* have blow. S'gettin' late."

"First I wanna know what this little pisser's gonna do to me."

"Come on," Carly yanked my arm and we jumped off the chair. Jack One followed suit and walked around to face me up close.

"Let us alone," I said.

"Why?" asked Jack One. "Girly here is truly cute. My kind of fun time would be stomping your nuts into the sand, and then taking her to a party in her honor at my place. Go *all* night." He glared at Carly. "You a virgin, babe?"

"Drink another beer, asshole." She started to walk away, not waiting for me.

I took a step, but it happened to be across the path of Jack One. My shoulder bumped his.

"That was dumb," he muttered.

And he hit me. The impact was a quarter-stick of dynamite in my cheek. His ring ripped a hole, and blood poured over my neck and cheek. I went down, feeling it all come to life, feeling the sweat sizzling on my arms and chest, burning off the sand stuck there. Jack One laughed and blurted, "Have some!"

Carly screamed, "You prick!" and tried to get loose, but Jack Two suddenly had her arm up behind her.

But then, as I licked my lips of blood, I could smell the familiar smell. My personal scent. Bubbling plastic. Roadkill gas. Jack One stopped and looked at his

fist in the moonlight. Through the swirling colors in my vision, I could see the confusion on his face. His work stoppage made his fuddy ask, "What's wrong, man? Kick the sumbitch!" Carly kicked and struggled, but Jack Two only tightened his grip and licked her ear.

"My hand's burning," Jack One said. "What the hell?" He stared out of fascination more than fear, but within seconds—as my sweat and blood settled into his pores—his eyes gradually began to widen, and his face flared. "Oh, shit, man," he whined, starting to shake his hand. Then harder. Then frantically. "Oh, man, this hurts!"

"What's wrong, Johnny?" asked Jack Two.

"My hand, man, my hand," Jack Johnny replied, squealing now. He wiped his fist on his tanktop. "The fucker has something on him."

"Travis!" cried Carly, and Jack Two tried to headbutt her, catching only a glancing blow. She began screaming for help, struggling more and more. It was late though, and the beaches empty. I looked up and down the sand from pier to pier. No cop headlights. No nothing. Anyone on the beach now would be scumsuckers wanting to do the same things these jocks were doing. To beat me to death. And rape Carly.

Rape Carly. My god, those words suddenly *covered* me with hot tar. Burning like tape ripped off sunburned scabs.

"What the fuck'd you do to me, man?" barked Jack Johnny. He kicked me hard in the ribs. I tried to stand and he kicked me again, harder. His bare toenails cut my side.

Carly screamed again and again. Jack Two twisted her arm harder and tried to clamp a hand on her mouth. Her tears glistened like diamonds. Jack Johnny continued to bark and kick me.

And then his bare toes began to cook as well. "God damn this burn shit, man!" he bellowed.

He put his hand and foot in the water to cool. Swirled them around.

I didn't expect what happened next, but I did understand it. Jack Johnny's cocky relief disappeared as if knocked away with a bat. He screamed, but not a normal scream. He *screeched*. To God, for God, at God. He was dying, and he knew it. His hand came off in the surf, this his foot. He fell into the water, writhing like a gaffed fish. But then he crawled out of the saliva onto the sand, on hands and knees, strangely garbled and bubble-voiced. At first I

couldn't see, and then I could; it was incredible. His contaminated hand was around his throat, squeezing like a hydraulic clamp. Fingers of galvanized cable, superheated to toxic half-life and burning through his skin and blood passages. He died horribly, in seconds, under the moon and my terrified face.

Jack Two could only let go of Carly and shake. What the hell was he seeing? Who knew? I knew, and I felt discharge coming. It was alive in me now, coming out despite my fear and loathing for all things beneath me, all things in the way of my descent. My perceptions of men and their wants, their territories, their crimes. The scum of the earth was now a molten charge in my belly, the temperature of compressed volcanic rock.

I did not want him, but my belly had to have him. What was inside me took him.

Tears burned on my cheeks as I rose. I didn't want to see this happen again. Couldn't bear having Carly see what I really was, what the chemicals of the world had opened in my belly. Couldn't bear the constant flashbacks of Mom and Dad erupting on each other, on my brother Charlie, on the sacred ground itself. Guzzling the water, insatiably, horribly guzzling their death. My brother discharging on my mother, burning her away with screams and denial. It wasn't *him*! It was the stuff! The stuff!

As it was now.

I was my mother's son.

I turned to him, and Jack Two took my discharge full in the face and chest. Carly screamed from a few yards away, watched as Jack Two became the french fries I enjoyed all summer long on those cool nights before the sunburn activated me—stinking of vinegar, all cooked and ketchup.

His ribs came to life in his chest, turning inward and stabbing the life from his heart, repeatedly, angrily. His teeth burrowed back into his gums and disabled his sinuses, then his brain. He pitched forward with hardly a sound.

I let all the air out of me and collapsed against the lifeguard chair. Half a mouthful of blue bile went back down my throat, as harsh as grain alcohol.

"Carly..." I began.

But she was hysterical. Gasping. Sobbing. Hugging herself. Stepping back from me.

"Carly...please."

Stepping back. Back.

"All I...God, Carly, please wait. Please. All I wanted to do was protect you."

Stepping back. Turning away.

"That's all I ever wanted to do!"

Protect her, love her. Save her from the scum of the earth. Even though I knew, better than breathing, how deeply rooted the scum was in myself. The runts on the boards had nothing on me. I could have been their god.

No.

I said her name once more before she was across the sand, and gone.

17.

I PULLED THE jocks into the saliva surf before something dangerous happened, something that might harm an innocent beachcomber. Even though I knew in my core no one was innocent—let alone worthwhile—at night on the boards.

Scum.

God, that word, that concept. I'd tasted every facet of it. Killed for it.

Oh, God...*unacceptable*. Totally, irrevocably unacceptable. I *killed*. But I did hate these people, something deeper than the simple ignorance of racism, a hatred of a kind of man, an adventurer unconcerned

with the needs of those around him. He wanted only to soothe his itches, to shine his cock's comb, to pound his chest. The boardwalk was saturated with them, and the women who encouraged them.

I was one, even if the killing was in self-defense.

See, I *hated* them. By all rights, with the power I possessed I should have attacked the boardwalk on a cosmic scale. Widespread scum disposal. Destruction, twisted metal, flames everywhere, longhaired junkies and rapists melting and choking themselves with their own detached hands. Toes burrowing into thighs and disabling genitals. I was at that point, *I could have done that and ruled a territory the size usually reserved for royalty!*

But I couldn't. It made me like them. A simple moral. You've heard it before, and usually nothing is allowed to slide; the screen explodes with Schwarzenegger justice. I was glad those two jocks were dead, but I got no pleasure from it. Pleasure, I reasoned, separated incidental lowlife from true, pure, spiritual lowlife. The jocks were dead, yes, and I was exploding with hatred. But Carly was gone.

The boardwalk—with a cooling, breeze-like sigh—remained peaceful that

night.

18.

HOW DOES THIS end?

This story is simply reminiscence. I got to be in love, monstrous as it turned out. I became the one to dread. But by now, as you read this, I'm gone. Out to sea in a small outboard, then into the sea face-first, and all the way down until I need to breathe. By then it will be too late to come up. Or perhaps a pair of angry jocks will have their hands on me by then. Either way, you know?

Down into the saliva. Where I can calmly be digested amid the coupling mews of the scum of the earth. Living is too dangerous to others. There is too much I want to do to loud, cocky people in my way. So down I go, into the sea.

But I'm aware that the currents are strong and hard. I'll sizzle. I'll make the water boil. I'll be like the barrels thrown off pickup trucks and barges, like the garbage bags full of chemotherapy jellyfish and crab-like needles. I'll be pollution. But I'll try to sleep with the fishes, I'll dissolve. For Carly. For the nightmares I know I've given her.

For her, I'll try not to come back.



Lilith

by Scott David Aniowski

O'er what nighted landscape dreaming,
Silently stalks the Queen of the Night
With cloven hooves, ruby lips, flesh of white.
Seductress, Harlot, Mother of teeming
Hordes of Hell, souls lost and screaming.
Bringer of pleasures and erotic fright,
Blasphemous carnal triumphs against the Light:
Sins of the flesh, masturbating adolescent dreaming.

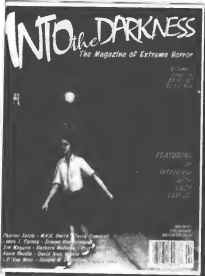
Fiery kiss of unholy passion,
Watch, seduce, steal the seed before morn.
Orgasmic death and life reborn;
From dirt and semen nightchildren fashion.
Adam-scorned and Satan-wed;
Bearer of strange joys where the salacious tread.

Y'golonac

by Scott David Aniowski

He sleeps beyond the wall of stone
Where eyeless tattered slaves grovel at His side
And spout forbidden lore from the worm-shunned tome.
Called forth by those of sin and pride:
The hands, the mouths, the bloated corpse --
Nightmare's Prince, the headless beast.
The soul corrupts, the body warps,
And upon the carcass the vermin feast.

Prophet of the Old Ones
Singing dirges and dark hymns:
Requiem for the sinners, His chosen sons.
Master of torturous pleasures and black abyssal whims,
He dreams the dream of timeless pain
And slumbers 'til the day He walks as man again.



INTO THE DARKNESS #4 * Edited by Dave Barnett * Necro Publications, PO Box 540298, Orlando, FL 32854-0298 * 8.5"x11", 4 color cover * 80 pp * \$4.95 U.S., \$5.50 Canada

Review by Andrea Locke

FROM ALL ACCOUNTS, I understand that the editor of **INTO THE DARKNESS**, Dave Barnett, is an exceptionally nice man. And it's obvious that he takes great pride in producing this magazine. **INTO THE DARKNESS** is a beautifully manufactured work, with slick, full color covers and readable type and attractive layout. Barnett's love for this endeavor is unmistakable.

However, I didn't enjoy reading this magazine. At all. And as you might expect, I'll tell you why....

INTO THE DARKNESS is dedicated to what, at the risk of using passe terminology, most people refer to as *splatterpunk*. You know what I mean: stories with lurid sex, during which women are treated as chunks of meat with convenient orifices; stories in which all concerned are treated to extreme acts of psychotic violence, all presented in vivid detail of mindless gore. I make no apologies for being disgusted with such pornography. And I wouldn't even be so disgusted if "mindless" weren't the most appropriate adjective to describe them.

Now, I might as well admit that this kind of story may be fine for those who enjoy such. Far be it from me to endorse any kind

of censorship. So, if there is a market for **INTO THE DARKNESS**, I hope it reaches that market and does well. But the sameness of that which marks all porno marks this magazine, too: the stories are virtually interchangeable. Character makes appearance, character is a werewolf (which is either obvious from the beginning or revealed in a *surprise* ending), character rapes, character kills (usually the rape victim), the end. What made the reading of this dreck even *more* disgusting for me was that some of it is from authors I generally admire.

Of the stories, "Another Animal Lover" by David Niall Wilson was not terribly violent, and it did not feature the abuse of a woman -- a mere manual laborer is horribly slaughtered. And "A Place for Us All" by Scott Brents was, structurally, a competent story, for all of its Marvel-Comic-Booby logic. Other than that...well, let's just stress that I'm reigning in my true feelings.

There's a rather boring interview with Lucy Taylor here, by Alex S. Johnson, who has also reviewed for **DEATHREALM**. However, in this case, I wish someone else had conducted the interview, because I grew very tired of the obsequious character of the questions, illustrated by overuse of such clichéd blubs as "Lucy Taylor creates fiction that pushes the borders of taboo to their outer limits," and "Taylor's stories deliver none of wet-palmed, adrenalized thrills to the intrepid horror reader." Sigh.

I was pleased with the artwork of Peter Francis, who has an intricate, unique style. An artist named Edward Bocanegra, of whom I've never heard, shows as yet undeveloped potential -- it doesn't strike me as being of pro quality, but his dynamic linework is pretty interesting. Keith Peters likewise presents a few fine drawings, that are reasonably pleasing, but still lack polish. Most of the rest of the art serves to illustrate why magazines like the late **AFTER HOURS** and, up to recently, **TERMINAL FRIGHT** might have opted for the bare-bones, artless look.

I might interject here that the numerous book and magazine review sections were generally okay; David Barnett, Michael Dean Cherry, Aaron Vest and Paula Guran are capable enough reviewers, even taking into account their bias toward "extreme horror." Can't complain here.

Alas, as fiction is the focus of this

magazine....

If you're into splatter, and enjoy reading about the spilling of gallons of blood, the raping of women, the murders of just about anyone and everyone, then **INTO THE DARKNESS** is the magazine for you. If you want logically constructed stories that, to coin the cliché, "push the envelope" of the dark fantasy genre, then look elsewhere.



BLOODSONGS * Edited by Steve Proposch * PO Box 7530, St. Kilda Road, Melbourne VIC 3004, Australia * 8.5"x11", 4-color cover * 66 pp. * \$4.95 U.S.

Review by Andrea Locke

WELL, I REVIEWED a magazine from down under last issue. I didn't care for it. I don't care for this one, either. Again, it's for much the same reason: I'm not into the "splatter" scene. Basically, this magazine's contents turned my stomach.

So, let's get this review done with as little bile (and time) as possible.

There were six short stories here. First, we're presented with "The Final Pleasure" by Gary Bowen. I read a story by him some months back that I enjoyed. It was about a guy being possessed by a gay spirit. In this one, we have a gay guy being physically and sexually abused (re: raped) by a Nazi in postwar Germany. The story begins with some vaguely clever writing, but degenerates into some rather vivid pornography. Maybe Bowen got his rocks off writing this, but I certainly didn't enjoy reading it. I

wonder if Bowen ever writes about heterosexual characters. This one was a lousy read.

After that wonderful tale I treated myself to "The Family Underwater" by Lucy Taylor. This one is a self-important little bit of fluff in which a young girl finds that she lives in a house full of water with her family. This heavy-handed attempt at symbolism was quite crude. The girl finds herself enduring the density of the atmosphere as it alienates her friends. Eventually she meets a young man and goes to his apartment and, oh, Buddha—surprise!—his house is full of water, too!

Next I came to "What the Stone of Ciparri Says." This is some kind of faux historical/fantasy bit written by a psychiatrist from Scotland. I didn't like it. It was a bit of grue about heads being chopped off and still living for a bit afterwards. I didn't like it. (Oh! I said that already, didn't I?)

"Bandages" by Bryce Stevens was an exercise in trying to make a neat character out of a bloody psychotic. (Hm. Shouldn't the psychiatrist have written this one?) It was, thankfully, forgetful. And "God of Pain," by Douglas Janson, was a jumbled, mish-mash of disgusting imagery that I couldn't quite fathom.

Finally, amidst the dreck, there was "Twelve Hour Layover" by Kat Ricker, who the editors admit they know nothing about, save that she submitted some stories and that she's from Ohio. I vaguely recall encountering her name before, but this story is very, very good. It's quite different from the rest of the stories (Shall we call them stories? OK, let's.) in **BLOODSONGS** in that it was subtle and quite moving. It features a character laying over at a bar, going in and finding company and getting quite drunk and encountering something that were I to talk of it would reveal too much of the story. I think it's sufficient to say that I was impressed with the writing and the concept of this story.

There's a bit of nonfiction here, too. There's the last part of an overview of all the zombie movies ever made. I have to admit to quite liking the Romero zombie flicks, so I can't play high and mighty on that count. It's an okay article. There's also an interview with Clive Barker that's fairly good, and a brief, though somewhat inaccurate, description of the American horror fiction market by S. Darnbrook Colson. And the same interview with Lucy Taylor that ap-

pears in **INTO THE DARKNESS** is also here....

Personally, I won't be looking forward to another issue of **BLOODSONGS**. However, if you're the type who likes looking at fresh bullet wounds, by all means, help yourself....



LORE #3 * Edited by Rod Heather, PO Box 672, Middletown, NJ 07748 * Digest, B&W * 60 pp. * \$4.00 U.S./\$5.25 Foreign
Review by Andrea Locke

LORE #3 IS, plainly said, one of the best little packages of short stories I have seen a long time. Every story in here was fun, and at least two of them are, in my opinion, year's best material. Let me tell you about Rod Heather's latest effort.

First of all, the cover is a real screamer. It's by one of my favorite comic artists, Richard Corben (You remember: *Den*, from *Heavy Metal*, and the *Bat Out of Hell* album cover for Meatloaf). It's done in what looks to be gouache on canvas, a medium that was quite common in the late fifties and early sixties, but which one doesn't see a lot of these days. The subject matter must be seen to be appreciated. It stunned me when I took it out of the envelope. Makes you just want to buy it for the cover, alone.

Now for the stories. What a lineup of quality fiction. As I read each one, I kept expecting to read a clunker. I was still waiting as I turned the last page. What a magazine!

First of all, we are treated to "Sheets" by Donald Burleson. A lot of writers use women as vulnerable victims in their stories; it's a kind of cheap shot, it seems to me: an easy way out for the male writer. However, when it's handled well, it's not a drawback or

a cheap shot. Here, Burleson introduces us to Rebecca Hudson Payne, an elderly widow living alone in the huge house left to her by an abusive husband. Her children don't visit, and so she's alone. In the house. With her late husband's sheeted parlor furniture. Burleson slowly builds sympathy and history and *tension* with this tale until we read the last paragraph and are treated to a genuine chill.

The next story is "A Head Full of Pigs." Now, while this story is very well written, and it showcases an interesting study in character, I do have to admit I was a little disappointed in where it took me. The author, Ken Goldman, proves himself to be quite clever and capable, save for the fact that the story eventually falls a bit flat, even with some agreeable weirdness right at the end. The story seemed to have been leading to something effective, but instead opted out for predictable. It was the weakest story in the magazine, but even then was hardly *bad*.

"Totem Pole" is by Wilum Pugmire. Like much of his fiction, it's very short and to the point. But it's a *Year's Best* kind of treat. I don't suspect I'll read very many stories over the next twelve months that are as well written as this one. Here, we once again visit Pugmire's Sesqua Valley setting. HPL's Arkham country has nothing on this place. The tale has a lecherous, homoerotic tilt to it that is subtle and hilarious and weird. Maybe I did know where it was taking me, but Pugmire's dark humor is effective enough—and the ride so much pure fun—that I didn't care. What a tale!

"The Challenge From Below" is a the first part of a round robin, the initial chapter instigated by that great elder one himself, Robert M. Price. I liked the beginning of this longish setup, but I'm growing a bit tired of the Lovecraftian scene when it's not handled with the humor and weirdness of someone like Pugmire. This is, apparently, some kind of homage to "The Challenge From Beyond" by Merrit, HPL, REH, et al, from decades ago. What Heather has apparently forgotten is that "The Challenge From Beyond" was pretty awful. This one has some potential — I just hope it doesn't turn out to be forgettable as it progresses.

The next story is "The Game of Kings" by Tim Emswiler, a name unfamiliar to me. This one deals with a pair of friends who meet often to play chess, the better player of the two postulating just what *chess* really is

and what it may truly mean. This one, too, is, as far as I am concerned, *Year's Best* material. In fact, were I doing a year's best collection, this beauty would go right at the front! It's a weird, wonderful, *perfect* journey that takes an intangible concept and makes it whole for us...as if we can grasp and understand that *vastation* that is sometimes visited upon us. A lot of authors try, so many of them unsuccessfully; but Emswiler succeeds with this story.

The last story in the book is "Empathy" by Jeffrey Thomas. Now, while I must admit that the ending of this left me just a tad disappointed, the walk alongside the story's deaf, beautiful, dear protagonist was a treasure of characterization. *This* is how it's done. This is what a true professional can achieve. Jeffrey Thomas is beginning to loom in this field. I predict that he'll be with us for a long time, writing stories like this, and better. The accompanying illustration is also by Mr. Thomas and I have to say I am doubly impressed with him. (I'll bet I know who the model for this art is. The true love shines through.)

Well, all in all, I have to say that Heather's *LORE* is the best new magazine to appear in a while. With this issue, he's overtaken everyone else on my list. I can only hope that he can keep this up. How many stories are there that are as good as the ones he presents for us in this issue? Buy a copy. It comes with this curmudgeon's highest recommendation. It pleased me. What more can I say?

TERMINAL FRIGHT #11 * Edited by Ken Abner, PO Box 100, Black River, NY 13612-0100 * 8.5"x11", 2 color cover * 74 pp * \$5.00 U.S.

Review by Brian McNaughton

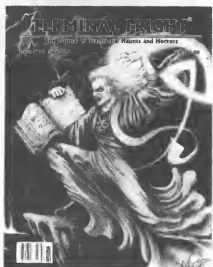
I HATE to report this, but Ken Abner has finally dropped the ball. For ten issues he has mailed *TERMINAL FRIGHT* with such regularity that you could set your calendar by it. But issue #11 was *ten days late*!

Other small pressers, of course, have been known to be as much as ten years late, but Abner must be held to a higher standard, since he puts out the best all-fiction magazine of traditional horror and puts it out on time.

But wait! What's this? A note just fell out of my copy—an apology from Ken for the delay, blaming it on the printer. A likely story! Printers are professionals, right, not like the people who publish *amateur* magazines?

But I think we can let him off the hook this one time. He's sure to be back on his clockwork standard with the next one.

Don't wait for that one, though, because #11 is the best issue I have seen yet. The only bad thing about it is the absence of a Tom Piccirilli tale, a frequent treat in *TERMINAL FRIGHT*; but the gap is ably filled with a long and rather Piccirillish story, "Razorwings," by Dale L. Sproule. Sproule's voice is entirely his own, and a scary one indeed, but his mixture of Ancient Evil with up-to-the-minute lowlives should delight Tom's fans. The baddies here are the soul-eating Barrow Kings and their attendant Imps, exiled from the Old World, much diminished from what they were, but still able to prowl the mean streets of Vancouver and prey on its convincingly-sketched winos



and junkies and hookers. The tale combines horror with non-stop action as sexes and allegiances switch before you can say, "Ia! Shub-Niggurath!" Very nice work.

Donald R. Burleson is rapidly gaining the following his work deserves, who won't be disappointed by his story of an old hopscotch diagram haunted by the ghost of a murdered girl...and by something more... He understands that there can be no horror unless it rises to confront a strongly drawn protagonist in a very specific time and place.

Terry McGarry understands that, too, and her "Taibhse" made me homesick for New York City and its Irish bars; although the stiff jolts of horror here are equal to a few belts of John Jameson's, with the Clancy Brothers singing of old unhappy, things in the background. (For the benefit of other culturally-orphaned Wild Geese: Terry tells

me the title rhymes with "HAVE-shuh.")

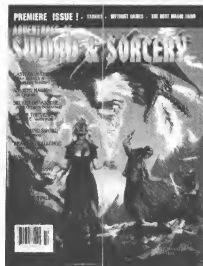
"Poe 103" gives us the Master himself—more of him, indeed, than the protagonist hopes for—in a neat and subtle tale by Ken Goldman, who obviously loves Poe and can quote him with telling effect. In "Remember for Me, My Sweet," Bill Scheinman bounces off the wall of mad scientists and over the top of regressive hypnotists with a fun read that suggests Thomas Ligotti in a lighter mood, if you can imagine that.

The remaining stories by Charles M. Saplak, by Gene KoKayKo and Craig Strickland, and by A.M. Dellamonica would ornament any professional magazine of traditional haunts and horrors...well, they would if there were one.

I know, it's an enormous void to fill, but *TF* comes damned close to filling the one left by the original *WEIRD TALES*.

Ken has taken to using interior artwork lately: a good move, especially since he has discovered his very own version of Lee Brown Coye in Jason Cheney. Not that their styles are in any way similar, but Cheney's highly original and alarming work gives *TF* the kind of distinctive atmosphere that Coye lent *WEIRD TALES* in its latter days.

Buy it, you'll like it.



ADVENTURES OF SWORD & SORcery #1 * Randall Dannenfelser, editor * PO Box 285, Xenia OH 45385 * 8.5"x11", 4-color cover * 92 pp. * \$4.50 U.S.

Review by Andrea Locke

THIS MAGAZINE HAS certainly begun its days as a beautiful publication. It looks professional in just about every way one could hope. The layout reminds me a bit of

the late, lamented **WITCHRAFT & SORCERY** from the late 60s, early 70s. Most of the art is nice, and I was pleased to see some illness by George Barr, he's been a favorite of mine for a long time.

As for the fiction, I first must admit that it's been a very long time since I've read much fantasy. Sword and sorcery stories were one of my first loves, and I can recall cutting my teeth on authors ranging from J.R.R. Tolkien to Robert E. Howard to Fritz Leiber to—later—Terry Brooks, and even Karl Edward Wagner. This was fun stuff for me, but I went on to other things and have not paid much attention to the subgenre for years and years.

With that disclaimer in place, I have to say that the fiction in **ADVENTURES** is generally of high calibre. However, within many of them lurks what I consider to be a fairly substantial flaw—that being that the authors seem to be narrating to the reader, telling us everything we need to know rather than letting the story flow, with actions and dialogue shaping the characters and driving the plot as we read. Since many of the stories here seemed to suffer from that problem, I won't single any of those authors out for castigation. But I will point out a couple of stories that either worked well—or didn't.

"The Alchemy of Souls" was a neat little tale from David Niall Wilson. It tells the story of a sorcerer's apprentice who plots revenge against a rather nasty, necromantic master. The hand of the author here is felt rather than seen, and so we read the thoughts of the apprentice and are treated to a bit of turnabout that is very nearly as nasty as the crimes committed by the sorcerer. This is just one of many fine works from the remarkably prolific Wilson—who proves himself adept at many styles of genres of writing.

A story that was representative of what I felt was *wrong* with the fiction here is "Their Cup Runneth Over" by Mitchell Diamond. There is the germ of a neat idea here: a duke who had a flagon that magically produced high quality mead which he sold to make himself wealthy; the flagon is stolen and the protagonists begin their quest. And a long and tedious quest it is. The story quickly degenerates into a boring quagmire that reads something like a cliffhanger serial with thieves and swordsmen falling from one foul up to another. Yick.

"disIllusions" by Mike Resnick and Lawrence Schimel is a bit of a fun read, for all of its predictability. And Lyn Nichols'

"Thief of Dreams" is kind of a dark tale that did manage to surprise me with an upbeat ending, an ending that was not telegraphed by the gloom of most of what preceded it. A few of the other authors also kicked in with some good efforts, most notably Jo Clayton's "Potholes in the Road to Hell", and John Betancourt's "The Brothers Lammit in Yassene" which, while a bit long for my tastes, did not descend into faux archaic prose in an attempt to capture "atmosphere".

Overall, I was actually rather pleased with the initial issue of **ADVENTURES**. Fantasy fan though I no longer am, there is enough superior work here to make me want to read the next issue. I wish Mr. Dannenfels much luck in this new and much needed addition to the marketplace. Perhaps his enthusiasm can help rekindle the popularity that sword and sorcery enjoyed in my youth.



WHITE KNUCKLES, Vol. 1, Issue 3, Fall 1995 * John R. Platt, Editor & Publisher * PO Box 973, New Providence, NJ 07974-0973 * 5.5"x8.5", b&w * \$4.00.

Review by Herb Greenhouse

OKAY, THIS IS a small press magazine. I understand low budget publications well enough. Over the years I've read them, hated them, loved them. The one thing to look for in these, the one thing that can make it worth the poor print quality, stapled stock paper, and generally poor black and white illustrations is that spark of something different. Unfortunately, in the case of **WHITE KNUCKLES**, the spark is not yet there.

There are five stories in this issue. Kurt Newton brings us "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep," and it almost did. The basic storyline is not bad, and some of the characterization is well done, but this story drags on for eleven

pages of the magazine, and it could have easily (and more properly) been told in about six. This is a growing-pains sort of thing on the part of the writer. In the small press, editors need to be willing to do that "E" thing more often than in the professional press. The pro editors just reject it if it needs work, but in the small press that work should be pursued.

Anyway, story number two is from J.R. Hanson and Jillian Young. This is probably the smoothest writing in the mag. The story is well told, and you can care about the characters—albeit it is a vampire story, which is difficult to find a new twist on. This one has a major problem, too. It reads like an excerpt from a larger work (which I suspect it is). There are wide, sweeping plot-lines happening here that are brushed aside with the same sort of nonchalance that a novelist might use, had he already covered *all that* in the first few chapters. Minus those chapters, this one falls short.

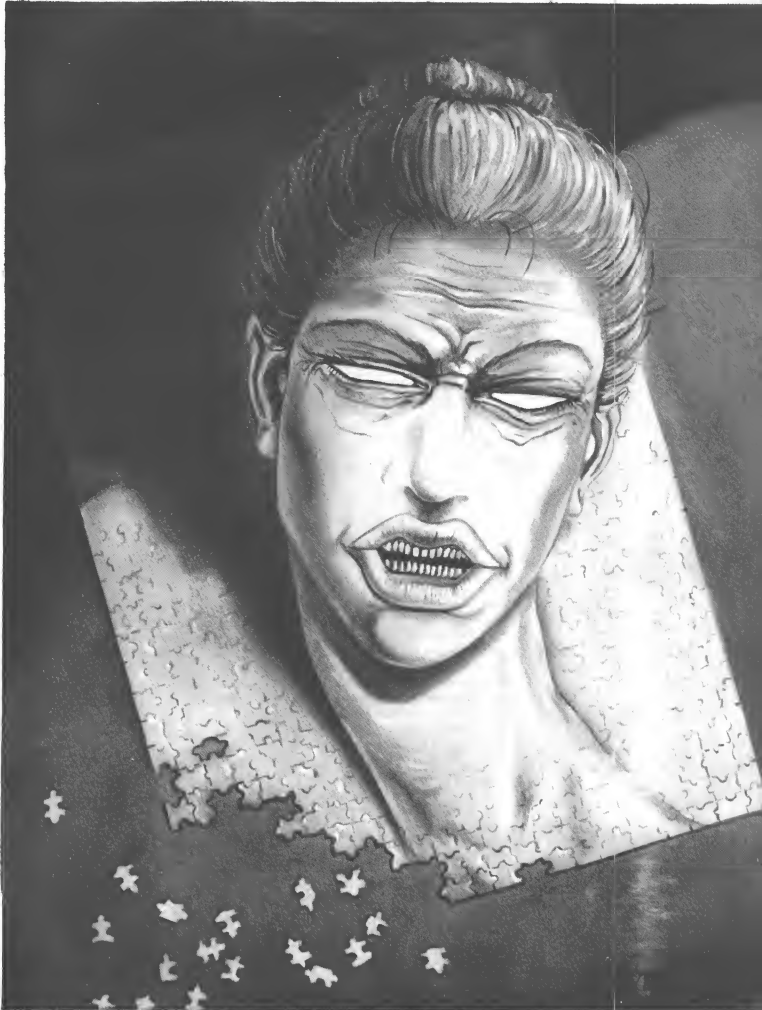
"The Antichrist Wore Cowboy Boots," by Terry Campbell, is preachy, and it goes on far too long, much like the first piece by Mr. Newton. It reads much like an essay on the author's beliefs concerning society and the Antichrist in us all, not so much like a story.

"Fast Buck," by Carter Swart, is a run-of-the-mill shot at a movie violence thriller with nothing new to add, including plausibility. "When Yesterday Bleeds," by Dennis S. Beecher is a sort of Stephen Kingish serial-killer in the small town kind of piece that's title is the best part about it. It never suspends the disbelief thoroughly enough, and again, it has nothing new to offer to a tired old theme.

The final tale, "Depression," by Robert Steven Rhine, is a shot at a stylistic, modernist tale of heaven, hell, and elevators, seen through the eyes of Marvin, king of depression. It has moments of brilliance where a budding talent shows through, but writing of this sort is the most difficult to pull off, even for a seasoned writer, and in this case it misses the mark. This tale does provide the first hints of that "spark of something different" mentioned above.

The featured poet, Donna Taylor, has some interesting imagery to offer, but poetry is rarely enough to pull a magazine out of the mire. I'd say this is a magazine with some growing to do, particularly from the editorial standpoint. Two of five tombstones.

(Continued on Page 54)



Jigsaw

By Donald R. Burleson

*Patiently...determinedly...she fit the pieces of the puzzle together.
An innocent portrait of a woman -- a classic portrait -- yet,
somehow, the work of art seemed subtly wrong,
in a way made her at first uneasy...and finally -- terrified.*

OUT OF CHAOS, a face.

At least the dim suggestion of a face--vague, remote, formative, like something undecided, something not yet born.

Propped against the back of a wrought-iron candleholder in the center of the kitchen table, the face, the face as it should look, peers at Esther Lillibridge across the table like a presumptuous dinner guest who has leaned too close, her features large and imposing. The picture on the cardboard boxtop represents a section of a painting by Modigliani, showing a tubular neck barely supporting the narrow, tilting head of a young woman, delicate, pretty in a strange kind of way, with a face out of which pupilless blue-green almond eyes float blankly beside a long sloping nose; overshadowing small rosebud lips. Hers is a creamy-peach face above which the auburn hair is pulled up and fastened into a bun. Enlarged to allow inclusion of only thin crescents of pale green background, the face fills nearly the whole scene with its wan suggestion of a smile, a smile made more indeterminate by the fact that the background is nearly the same color as the blank eyes and seems to show through them, as if the eyes were holes in a fragile paper mask; overall, the woman is oddly intriguing. This is the figure, so clearly detailed in the picture, that so problematically struggles, against all odds, to show through its jumble of chaos on the tabletop, where frenzied hundreds of tiny fragments lie in disarray, the job barely begun.

Twenty-five hundred fragments, to be exact--this is one of the so-called "grand jigsaws," terribly difficult, a supreme challenge even to so seasoned and expert a

puzzleworker as Esther. The pieces are tiny, tedious, maddeningly alike; they pose a problem that may well take weeks.

But then what is that to Esther Lillibridge? She has plenty of time, if little else. Is it odd of her, perhaps, to presume that she has plenty of time, at eighty-six? She thinks not; indeed, for her, time has largely ceased to exist as a concern; she never worries about it one way or the other, except to reflect, now and then, that the less one thinks about time, the less it is a problem. It runs backwards as well as forwards anyway, when one has so many memories. But in any case she has a great deal to think about as it is, with this puzzle, and no time to fret about time. If the puzzle takes a month, two months, a year, well--the pleasure is in the journey, after all, not in the arrival.

She will prevail, of course; the drably papered walls of her simple apartment are bedecked with preserved triumphs over past puzzles, glued down and framed, frozen in time like subdued and mummified rows of trophies, dried-out and brittle spoils of the hunt. These puzzles, these once opaque problems, have long since succumbed; Esther survives them.

But in all her many years she has never begun such a puzzle as this.

The near end of the kitchen table is cleared away, stays cleared away most of the time, her usual workspace; and a few ragged pieces of the puzzle are in place, staggering around a drunken square, the border, which of course one always assembles first. This large border is like a stage with the curtain going up, a vacuous, pregnant space in which one can scarcely imagine what is about to happen. Within, Esther has merely put down a few disconnected pieces that may, just

may, belong somewhere in the vicinity, due to their coloring or, in rare cases, their patterning, their fragmented resemblance to some feature of the desired picture. But most of the pieces are still in the box, yet to be sorted by color or pattern, and Esther realizes that the large face, consuming virtually the whole picture on the boxtop, will possess broad, bewildering expanses of unbroken peach-flesh, relieved only by exceedingly gradual gradations in color, gradations only discernible to a sharp eye--the faint suggestion of shadow near the nose, the very slightly darker cheeks near the edges of the oval face and at certain places about the eyes. It will be difficult.

Difficult, yes, but *that*, Esther has to admit to herself, is not the subtle and peculiar something that is troubling her.

"IT ISN'T HEALTHY, you know." Claire Woodbury, from down on the third floor, fusses over needlework and sniffs her eternal disapproval, no different today than any other time, glaring at Esther from the far side of the table. Her pinched face, hanging above the cardboard Modigliani image, seems to have a beard, but this is only the cardboard woman's bun. "Not healthy, and not normal. A person spending all her time putting together silly puzzles. You weren't always like this."

"Like what, Claire?" Esther asks absently. Somewhere there is a piece that should belong near the center of the lower lip, but she can't find it.

"You aren't listening to me at all." Claire has drawn her arms up and crossed them, and is pouting. At length she says, "You and I used to go to concerts. I still go. But *you*--I don't think you ever stir out of



JIGSAW



that chair."

"Yes I do," Esther says wearily; she seems to recall this conversation from another of Claire's always unannounced visits. Anyway, what does Claire know about life, when she is only seventy-three? These young people always think they know everything. "I get my meals, I tidy up the place."

"Ho!" Claire's eyes widen out of a nest of creases like small bright birds wriggling awake. "Tidy up, do you." She runs her hand along the ledge beside the rollout desk, her fingers coming away bloated with dust. As this circumstance seems to speak for itself, she says no more on the subject.

"I like my puzzles," Esther says, wondering why she bothers to defend herself, and searching, still, for the missing piece of ochre lip. Ah, there it is. But no, when she tries to fit it onto the meager structure already laid down, it only *almost* fits, its tiny tabs feeling not quite right, its contours leaving tiny crooked spaces where no spaces should be, where the fit should be tight, but is not. The eternal frustration—a piece either fits or it doesn't; almost doesn't count. Where is that other piece?

At some point she notices that there is no one at the opposite end of the table. Claire must have left. Then again, poor Claire has been gone for over a year. Esther simply resurrects her in the mind at times, for someone to argue with.

TODAY HAS BEEN cloudy-grey, and the late-October evening has come with a gentle rain beyond the window, a soft blurring that makes the garish vertical neon sign on the smoke-grimed hotel facade across the street look like something in a dream. H TEL, it proclaims, sputtering and sizzling, its articulation oddly impaired. The effect of the neon illumination filtering through Esther's rain-spattered windowpanes is to spread a surreal dappling of light and dark through the room, in particular half-lighting the fragmented chaos of the jigsaw puzzle on the table, adding a bizarre chiaroscuro to Modigliani's already strange craft, in such a way as to make it unclear, on first glance, which ragged splotches of dim light are peach-flesh puzzle pieces and which are merely random patches of lighter tabletop amid regions of dark. One could try to pick up pieces that aren't even there. Esther snaps on an overhead light, sending the

rain-projected shadows fleeing, and stands looking over her puzzle, which is still only barely begun but evincing some tendency now for the enigmatic young woman's face to begin showing itself.

Esther rubs her temples and sighs. What is it about this puzzle, this face, that bothers her?

She sits down, scoots her chair up a little closer to the table, and starts to work again, sifting the pieces, scanning the problem with a wary eye. At this point, the portion of the face assembled so far is rather bizarre in its outlines, since it consists primarily of part of the jaw, most of the mouth, part of the nose, and most of the woman's left eye, augmented by scattered pieces laid down roughly in position but not actually fitted into the puzzle, mostly pieces of peach-colored cheek or forehead. In this fragmented view there is something almost cadaverous about the visage, the partial face, but that, Esther reflects, is not so strange. Naturally it looks odd, this half coherence, this ragged outline; she has seen such effects before.

Though not exactly like this either.

This is different, because—suddenly she realizes it—the face that is beginning to emerge on the tabletop seems to look a little different from the picture on the propped-up box lid.

Now, that would be downright unfair, and well-nigh unprecedented, Esther thinks, annoyed. They have to give you an accurate picture, a true representation of what the assembled puzzle will look like; they have to give you that.

But this, this is odd. In the picture on the cardboard box, the woman's expression combines a faint smile with a certain rarified sort of wistfulness; altogether it is an expression or mingling of expressions that one would find engaging. Yet in the jagged half-face beginning to appear amid the jumbled pieces on the table, the expression is subtly different. Maybe, Esther thinks, it's only because so much of the face is still missing, maybe the fragments that are in place don't really carry all of the true expression.

They seem to carry, instead, an expression that looks vaguely mocking.

Getting up and turning off the light to let the wash of rain-speckled neon light from the window play upon the tabletop again, Esther looks at the emerging face in that light, thinking that that may make a difference. And it does.

In this uncertain light, the effect is heightened.

Esther makes a desultory attempt to put a few more pieces in place, but it is late, she is tired; she leaves the puzzle as it is and goes to bed.

THINKING OF WHAT Claire Woodbury would say about the need to get out and around, Esther washes her breakfast dishes, resists the urge to work on the jigsaw puzzle, gets her overcoat and hat, and heads out the door and into the musty stairwell, where it is five flights down to the street. Out in the open air, which is crisply cold this morning, she pulls her collar close to her throat and walks to the park. She spends the morning on a bench there, watching comic fat pigeons trundle about on the sidewalk, then she walks farther downtown to Manny's Diner and has lunch at the counter, a ham and cheese sandwich on rye with a big mug of coffee. Somehow with the chatter of other customers all about her, the Modigliani face seems distant and unreal. Esther leaves the diner, spends the afternoon at the library browsing newspapers and magazines, and doesn't get back to her apartment building until dark. Invigorated by her day out on the town, her first in a long time, she barely notices the rigor of the long climb up the dimly lit stairwell, and is only a little winded when she reaches the fifth floor and fumbles with her key in the lock. The day has done her good; she feels refreshed, clear of mind.

The feeling changes when the door glides open to the maw of darkness that is her apartment.

Something in the air here is different. But of course it is; even the air of the city, out on the streets, is fresher than these stuffy old rooms. Still, that's not it. She stands half in the doorway, listening.

Because she has the most peculiar feeling that someone is in the apartment. It's nothing she can place, this impression, just a feeling, a certain charge in the air.

Of course the door has been locked. But even five floors up there is always the fire escape, the windows. She inclines her head a little more into the room, listens closely.

Nothing. Quiet in there. But is it, perhaps, the quiet of *someone*, someone trying not to make any noise? That feeling is still very strong, that somebody is in there, in there in the dark.

Reaching around the jamb, she expects a hand to close upon hers, but she

flicks the light switch without mishap. Everything looks normal so far. There is still that feeling, a cold little sensation catching at her throat. But she steps into the room, closes and locks the door, hangs her coat on the rack, and moves quietly through the front room toward the kitchen, realizing that she is walking quietly not to cover up—other sounds. On her way, she glances into the bedroom, sees only what she should see: bed neatly made and unwrinkled, nightstand, dresser, lamp. She steps into the kitchen and switches on the overhead light. The windows are still closed, untampered with. Nothing out of the ordinary here.

Nothing with the possible exception of the jigsaw puzzle, which she has felt right along is a bit out of the ordinary.

The face, still one-eyed and ragged, tries to stare up at her in its fragmentation. In its jutting outline, the impression is still cadaverous, but gobbets of flesh are slowly being added, not taken away, making a cadaver in reverse. Esther pulls up her chair, sits, and fiddles with the puzzle a little, fitting two pieces of cheek near a slightly darker region, the edge of the nose. With one more piece, the mouth is complete. Most of the nose is in place. There is still the other almond-shaped eye, and she works on sifting through the box and finding the pieces for that. One by one they emerge and she fits them together, making a sort of island precariously attached to the nose, an island with an eye. By eleven o'clock the face has both its eyes in place, though they float in patches of peach-colored cheek in a way that makes them resemble a cartoon-character robber's mask perched over the nose. There is nothing humorous in this impression, though. Now that both eyes are looking up out of the tabletop, they subtly work together with the contour of the ocher lips to convey more of the face's expression.

And it is undeniable now that the expression of the face emerging in the tabletop is not the same as in the picture on the box.

In the green eyes, blank as they are, there is something unpleasant, something that Esther cannot quite make out, a vague something that makes the pursed rosebud lips, the mouth, seem—but the impression is unplaceable.

It is late, and Esther is glad not to work on the puzzle any more tonight.

"YOU WILL KEEP doing that, and me

telling you it's unhealthy." Claire's ghost has shown up for midmorning coffee and criticism. She peers at Esther from across the table, shaking her head. "Never saw anyone so..."

"But I did get out, Claire. Yesterday. I went to the park, and later to the library."

Claire sniffs in her characteristic way. "But of course you wouldn't think of asking your old friend along."

Esther smiles. "I would have, Claire, but I left so early, you'd still have been asleep." Asleep indeed: across town, under the sod.

"Hmph." Claire stirs imaginary coffee. "I don't think you went out at all." She gets up, walks around the table to scrutinize both the puzzle itself and the picture on the box lid, and gestures with her coffee cup. "I think you're the one's that's painted on cardboard and stuck in a stuffy old apartment.

Abruptly she is aware that the greenish background around the woman's head is like the surface of some brackish pool, green with phosphorescent rot, an undulating pool in which the head, on its rubbery neck, floats like some pale and puffy flower...a tilting face now raises itself, oddly staring.

And is this what you're so avid about? Why, that's not even a good picture."

"It's Modigliani. You know, the Italian artist, turn of the century," Esther says.

"No," Claire says, "I mean, the picture they gave you to go by isn't even a good picture."

Esther knows that's what she meant, and reflects: she notices it too. Claire goes back and sits down and finishes her coffee, and the two do not talk much more after that. Claire seems nervous, and at some point, Esther notices later, has left. Esther hopes she hasn't been rude to her friend, even in the imagination, but the puzzle preoccupies her. It seems more comfortable to work on it in daylight. Abandoning, for now, the rest of the face proper, Esther is concentrating on fitting together some of the chin and neck, that long, rubbery-looking neck so typical of Modigliani, that tubular neck on which the head sits at a quizzical tilt. Somehow, it is more desirable today to work on this part, rather than on the enigmatic face. By early afternoon most of the neck is in place, to-

gether with most of the shaded outline of the chin.

And the old impression is beginning to grow again, that there is something wrong with the whole impression of the face. Something wrong, decidedly.

Esther decides to go out for a late lunch at the diner. Afterward, she stays out longer than she has planned, walking around the park, strolling down some nearby streets, windowshopping and—she finally realizes—making excuses not to go home. But the darkening sky has grown grumbly with clouds, and it looks as if the rain may start before she can get back. She has no umbrella, and walks back in something of a hurry, getting to her building just as the first fat drops are beginning to fall.

Up at her apartment door, fitting the key in the lock, she again has a kind of presentiment, but scoffs this time—she has been through this before, there is no one in her apartment.

No one, she thinks when she is back in her kitchen with the light on, no one but this woman. The woman in the puzzle.

She remembers feeling, early on, that the expression in the face seemed vaguely mocking; the impression is stronger now, in the blank green almond eyes tilting in the face, the slyly puckered lips, the long sloping nose, the head tilting atop the long, thin neck. Everything seems to combine in a sort of alchemy, yielding the face that looks up out of the tabletop with a faint suggestion of a smile, a smile that is not pleasant. Esther turns the light off, and as before the sensation heightens. Outside, the thunder grumbles, and the rain, heavier now, sends ripples of wavering neon light from across the way to wash across the table, the face.

In this pale and blotchy light, the face suddenly looks almost sinister.

Esther walks out of the kitchen, goes and gets ready for bed. But before going to bed she stands for a moment, in the dark, at the kitchen doorway, and realizes that she is listening. A curious little touch of fear has wormed its way into the base of her spine. This is foolish, of course. There is nothing she can possibly be listening for.

Nothing except that faint, faint raspiness, that dry and airy sound somewhere there in the dark: a suggestion of someone breathing, breathing, in there where no one could possibly be.

After a while it grows even fainter, and



JIGSAW



stops; or becomes so quiet as to be inaudible, and then the silence in the apartment is maddening.

After a nearly sleepless night Esther sits over her morning coffee, hair in her face, eyes puffy, and reflects once more that Claire's old philosophy is eminently right, that one has to get out and around, not just out for a sandwich, but really out. Maybe a trip somewhere, a vacation. She can't afford to take a real trip anywhere, of course, but that does not remove the need. This apartment, these rooms--this room--must be getting on her nerves.

Well--she knows one place she can go today.

By ten o'clock she is standing in Mulhany's, the department store uptown where she buys her jigsaw puzzles. She has the Modigliani box lid with her.

"Well," the young man waiting on her says, "I can't say I ever really thought about it before. I mean, I always just assumed the picture on the box was a good picture of the puzzle. Of course it could be a little different, I guess; you know, the colors, the way it's reproduced or something." He takes the box lid and looks at the printing on the top, the sides. "But you know, that's funny."

"What's funny?" Esther asks.

"Well, this brand. We don't sell puzzles of this brand. In fact to tell you the truth I've never even heard of it. You sure you bought it here?"

"Well, yes, I did, I buy all my puzzles here."

"Huh. I guess the distributor or somebody mixed it in with these others by mistake. If it's--do you want your money back?"

"No," Esther says, "I'll keep the puzzle. It's nearly put together."

SHE WALKS AROUND town, having dinner out, browsing uselessly in bookstores, putting off her return home, but finally she has to go. The poor weather will not lift; it has drizzled off and on for most of the afternoon, and again as the sky shrouds over with darkness there is a black hint of heavier rain, and when it begins to fall it is tinged, thought too early in the season, with sleet. Esther barely makes it home in time.

In the kitchen she stands over the puzzle, somehow too keyed up to sit, not bothering to put on the light. Behind her, the rain and sleet worry with long nervous fin-

gers at the windowpanes, and again a wash of sickly-pale neon light struggles through the trickling rain to illumine, in half-hearted fashion as if scarcely willing even to try to clarify, the face of the woman in the tabletop, whose now ghostly features sit tilting atop a tubular neck that has come to look almost serpentine. As before, it is difficult to distinguish between blotches of light and genuine pieces of the puzzle, but not many loose pieces remain. Esther's fingers fidget among them, sorting them, finding them, fitting them in, and in no time the last one, a ragged chunk of light green background flanking the face, slips into place. Esther, tired now and eager to sit after all, fumbles with a hand behind her and drags her chair forward and sits at the table and looks at the completed puzzle.

She feels, this time, no exultation, no sense of triumph over a difficult problem. The scenario forbids so simple or wholesome a response, for the face--there is no denying it--is most certainly not the face in the picture on the box, but a twisted caricature of that face, a sardonic parody of that face. It is superficially the same picture, the same woman, in essential details, but somehow the nose, the high forehead, the cheeks look pasty, bloated, unhealthy, to the extent that they somewhat change the shape of the face, and the expression is one almost, itself, redolent of the triumph that Esther should have earned the right herself to feel. The real shock is that the woman in the tabletop looks--alive. Alive and not well disposed, not pleasant, not friendly. Suddenly, to Esther, the effect is ghastly, unbearable, and she pushes the chair back and stands up and leans over the table on her outstretched arms, one hand planted on each side of the puzzle. Despite her repugnance, or perhaps because of it, she looks deeply into the face of the woman in the table, searches that darkly compelling countenance for some understanding of what, if anything, it means. Abruptly she is aware that the rim of greenish background around the woman's head is like the surface of some brackish pool, green with phosphorescent rot, an undulating pool in which the head, on its rubbery neck, floats like some pale and puffy flower. It is as if the tabletop itself is not a solid surface, but rather the opening to some well or pit, out of which a tilting face now raises itself, oddly staring. Esther, mesmerized, perspiring, can only watch, can only feel the skin on her own face tighten with fear, can only feel her own eyes bulge. Surely to God, if there is mercy in

heaven, the face, the head in the tabletop does not really move. Outside, the thunder rumbles, the icy rain whispers more insistently against the glass, the neon light wafts its leprous radiance through the troubled air to wash across an almond-eyed visage that either changes in the imagination only or changes so very, very gradually that it seems like imagination.

But slowly, slowly, dear God so slowly but so surely, the rosebud lips draw apart, the mouth opens. The head ever so excruciatingly slowly tilts even farther on its side, and yes, the mouth opens, smiling, to reveal two shocking rows of thin yellow teeth. Esther is under the impression that the mouth is also screaming, because someone is, and some corner of her mind registers a suspicion that it is she who is screaming. But she can think only of the face, whose eyes, like vacuous slits in a paper mask, seem mockingly to flaunt their very emptiness.

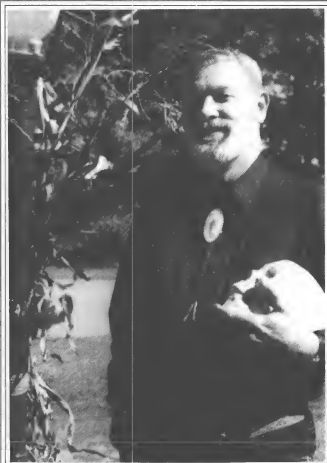
Suddenly, other senses are assaulted--there is the ragged sound of breathing, and Esther feels a press of warm and sickly air against her cheek, a rush of breath that reeks with a repellent sweetness that sends her backing away, choking. Somehow, flailing her arms, she finds her way out of the kitchen and into the front room, while from behind her there comes a vile medley of sounds, like the sounds of someone clambering up, muttering and wet and slimy, out of a pond onto dry ground. By now Esther's eyes have filled to brimming, so that she only vaguely sees someone push by her in the dark.

Returning to the kitchen, wiping her eyes and wondering why they have been watering, she snaps on the overhead light and peers at the table, where the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle lie in disarray, the randomly scattered pieces of a puzzle she has not yet begun to solve. Good heavens, it has been a strange evening, somehow. Her hair has partly come down, and she stops to fasten it back up into a bun before turning to the puzzle again. Craning her neck to see the picture on the box, she notes that it is the face of an elderly woman, and for some reason she feels uncomfortable about this puzzle. It is, for one thing, an unfamiliar brand, even though she bought it at Mulhany's as usual.



SILHOUETTES

Profile of Donald R. Burleson By Scott David Aniolowski



MR. HYDE THE MAN IN THE SHADOWS

ROBERT BLOCH ONCE wrote that fantasy writers are cast in the dual role of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. On one side there is the quiet, normal, mundane everyday life of a Dr. Jekyll where mortgages are paid and children are raised. No one fears Dr. Jekyll -- he's just like you and me. But on the other side -- the side that spins wonderfully horrible tales about monsters and psychos and things not wholly describable -- on the other side is Mr. Hyde. Mr. Hyde lurks beneath the quiet veneer, pecking out only when the

author sits in front of his or her computer, or takes out a pen and pad. Connoisseurs of horror literature savor the dark gifts Mr. Hyde gives to us.

Donald R. Burleson is one such Jekyll and Hyde. He holds doctorate degrees in the fields of mathematics and English, and teaches at a New Hampshire university. He has a lovely wife, a home, children, friends. He looks normal. He sounds normal. He is a kind, witty man and a good friend. Yet Don is the prolific author of scores of dark, twisted tales; stories that linger like an aftertaste, haunting the reader with their subtle creepiness. Stories about the dark side, about things beyond nightmares. Despite the horrific nature of his work, there is also quite often an element of dark Blochian humor or irony in Don's work.

To date, Burleson has sold close to 100 short stories to various magazines and anthologies too numerous to list. In addition, he's written close to a dozen text and scholarly books, something like 75 articles, and a number of poems. And he has had two fiction collections -- *Lemon Drops & Other Horrors*, and *Four Shadowings* -- already published, with another -- *Beyond the Lamplight* -- forthcoming. Now *Flute Song*, his first novel, has just been released.

Don's work has been compared to Ramsey Campbell's, and so when I interviewed him this was one of the first things I touched on. Did he feel his work was influ-

enced by Campbell's, and what did he think about being compared to him?

"Oh yes, I think there is no question about that. Ramsey is very definitely an influence on my fiction -- more so, I would say, than any other writer I've ever been conscious of being influenced by. Any association whatever with Ramsey Campbell has to be extremely gratifying. In my estimation, Ramsey Campbell is the best horror writer of our time."

But where did it all start? The year was 1955, and something happened that would change Don's life profoundly: he read H.P. Lovecraft's "The Colour out of Space" in the Groff Conklin anthology *Omnibus of Science Fiction*. It was from that first chance discovery of H.P.L. at the age of thirteen that Burleson would go on to develop his love of literature. He would move from Texas to New England in 1969 to be in Lovecraft country, and would eventually go through graduate school a second time, delivering his dissertation on Lovecraft to take his Ph.D. in English. He has since written numerous essays about Lovecraft, and has sat on Lovecraft panels at conventions. He counts among his closest friends members of the modern "Lovecraft Circle," and knew some of H.P.L.'s own friends, including Robert Bloch, Frank Belknap Long, J. Vernon Shea, and Donald Wandrei. Don even attributes meeting his wife Mollie at a World Fantasy Convention to their common interest in the Old Gent from Providence. So it seemed obvious and I suggested that H.P. Lovecraft must, of course, also be a major influence on his work.

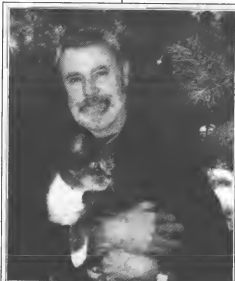
"Well, you know, I wouldn't say 'of course' with regard to Lovecraft. It's ironic, I guess, that even though I've devoted as much of my life as I have to H.P. Lovecraft, I think he's little or no influence on me, stylistically at least. I think I should say this, though, that Lovecraft is the reason why I'm in the field at all. It was from reading Poe and Lovecraft, actually, when I was in my early teens that I got interested in literature more generally in the first place. And certainly it's due to Lovecraft that I'm in the horror field. But as a literary influence, I



SILHOUETTES



really just don't think I write anything like him. It's a tricky thing though, you know, this business of influence, because one is not always aware of one's influences. I'm probably influenced by writers as diverse as Joyce Carol Oates and Ray Bradbury, and heaven knows who else? One is probably influenced by anyone one has ever read and liked. What a lot of people don't know about me, actually, is that I like Arthur Machen almost as well as I like Lovecraft. Whether I'm influenced by him or not is another matter. Stylistically, I doubt it. But I may very well be influenced by his ideas."



A Kinder, gentler Don? Dr. Jekyll with cat? Naaaahh, you just know Don's really thinking about what to put in the stew for dinner.

And indeed, Burleson has obviously tried hard to avoid Lovecraftian pastiche, beyond the story "The Last Supper," which I feel is ponderously Lovecraftian. In all fairness, I should mention that "The Last Supper" was Don's first fiction sale back in 1980. But even in his few Cthulhu Mythos/Lovecraftian tales he has avoided pastiche.

"Well, you've been extremely charitable to only characterize 'The Last Supper' as 'ponderously Lovecraftian.' I can imagine other ways it probably could be described. In a way that story kind of keeps coming back to haunt me. It's been reprinted a lot and even translated. Sometimes I get the feeling that it's probably going to be inscribed on my gravestone that I'm the author of 'The Last Supper,' and I have no doubt that the story will eventually surface at a sanity hearing. But yes, you're right, I do in general try to avoid Lovecraftian pastiche."

So what is Burleson's general philosophy about horror/weird fiction? Is there something he strives for in his work?

"As for a general philosophy of horror fiction, I suppose I would only be able to say that I strive to disturb my readers. I think all literature should disturb readers, but of course horror literature disturbs readers in a very special way. You mentioned before

something of an aftertaste of my fiction, and I think I could honestly say I do consciously strive for that. I like to think that my stories

will disturb people after the fact. One of my fondest fantasies is imagining someone waking up in the middle of the night thinking about one of my stories and being disturbed by it. I basically strive to frighten readers and to do it in as artful a way as I can because I think that horror literature should be held up to the very same high standards that all literature is."

Don has received critical praise for his fiction, and his work is well-liked and respected by many. I personally consider him the finest living author of the short horror story in America. But he's yet to catch on with the public, and his work has been mostly ignored by the masses and the media. He speaks frankly about why this might be:

"Well, I've always been primarily a short story writer and in this day and age I don't think a short story writer is likely to become a household name. I think becoming a household name requires publishing novels and preferably having them made into movies. I've written a number of novels--five as a matter of fact--and have had a really bizarre and spectacularly unlucky time at getting them published. We're sort of hitting on a sore spot with me here because I have spent, in fact, years and years and years trying to get through the strange publishing establishment in New York, and I've come to have, I'm afraid, some fairly cynical views about that whole scene. Frankly, I think there's a great deal of arbitrariness about what gets published and what doesn't, about who gets into that charmed circle and who doesn't."

"My wife Mollie not long ago looked at a novel from Zebra Books and found it to contain, I believe, something in the order of 600 serious errors: errors ranging from misspellings to the use of the wrong word, to syntax errors, sentences that were not sen-

tences--you name it. Everything that could be wrong with the book was wrong with it. And yet things like that get published. I really wonder if anyone can seriously believe that quality is what we're talking about when decisions like that are made? Don't get me wrong, I think there are a lot of good books out there. But unfortunately, I think there are a lot of very poor books out there. In fact, I think the reason why the horror field has come in for such a slump is that the industry has produced such a large amount of dreck. I think that the reading public has overdosed on that stuff."

"I have to admit that I'm very puzzled about what it takes to break into that carefully guarded charmed circle of theirs. I don't know if you just have to be in the right place at the right time, or if you have to draw circles and pentagrams on the floor and sacrifice a goat? I don't know if you have to give some editor on 5th Avenue a blow job? Frankly, you tell me. I just have no idea what it takes to get past them. I wasted years and years of my life on those people and I'm just really sick of it. I wonder if anyone can really believe that editors at some of these places sit up there and make intelligent and fair decisions about what gets published and what doesn't on the basis of good writing, of all things? Give me a fucking break!"

So he and Mollie formed Black Mesa Press and self-published *Flute Song*, his first novel to see print. The book really isn't horror, though, which would seem to be a real departure for Don.

"Oh, well, quite frankly I'm just tired of playing dumb games with the New York mafia. As I've mentioned before, I've spent years of my life playing dogshit games with those people. Sometimes sending manuscripts off, having an editor keep them for two years or longer, send them back without even a letter. Sometimes having readers who don't even let you get past them to a real editor send the novel back for no reason that's comprehensible. Basically, I think I've just wasted a lot of time. Frankly, I don't need New York anymore. I can produce a very attractive book, very reasonably priced. I can market it myself. And I wanted to get *Flute Song* out, especially in timely fashion and with control over it. I didn't want someone trying to tell me how to rewrite it or delaying its publication. I want it in print and I want it in print the way I've written it. I've worked very hard on it and I'm really excited about bringing it out."

PROFILE OF DONALD R. BURLESON

"But actually *Flute Song* is going to be my first published novel -- it's really the fifth novel I've written. And you're right, it's not really horror. I suppose if I can classify it at all I would have to call it something like a suspense novel. It's a labor of love, basically. It's set for one thing, in New Mexico, the beautiful land where Mollie and I would like to live one day. It's about the rumored crash of a UFO near Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947, brought up to the present time. As I said, it's a labor of love -- something I've worked very hard on and I'm very excited about bringing out. But it is something of a departure."

I wondered if there was any significance behind the name Black Mesa, and what was next for the press -- another novel, perhaps?

"Probably so. We're going to have to wait to see how things go. You know, a small press publishing concern is a very iffy and in some ways dangerous sort of thing. One has to hope that one survives. One has to hope that one's books sell. I feel good about that. I think we will be able to promote our publications and sell them. But we're going to see how that goes before we make any definite plans. I suspect that yes, we will be bringing out another one of my novels down the road a ways, and I would like to think even more than one more. Past that, I'm not sure, but we're definitely going to give it our best try."

"As for the name: Black Mesa is a topographical feature in New Mexico. It's actually a large, dark, rather spectral-looking, spooky-looking mesa in north-central New Mexico. Mollie and I, when we're down there every summer, drive past it and rather marvel at it, so we wanted to name the press after something to do with the deserts of the southwest and that seemed to be a very fitting name, so that's what we chose."

And Don has recently done an audio tape for Necronomic Press.

"Yes, very recently. The third week in October 1995, Mollie and I went down to Providence and went to a recording studio there, and I recorded this cassette. It's the first time I've ever done such a thing, and it was a great deal of fun. I recorded five stories. I recorded 'Milk,' which is an old *Twilight Zone* story of mine, 'Now You Know,' which is a story from *Deathrealm*, 'One Night Strand,' which is a story from the collection *Four Shadowings* from Necronomic Press, 'Brownie,' a story

from *Terminal Flight*, and 'Uncle Neddy's Chair,' which is a story from *After Hours*. It was a lot of fun and I'm looking forward to seeing it come out."

Burleson's collection *Lemon Drops and Other Horrors* had a very limited print-run, but was an impressive small press collection with 19 stories. That one has long been sold out and unavailable. *Four Shadowings* is a collection of four very fine tales, and is still available from Necronomic Press. He has another collection forthcoming from Jack O'Lantern Press: *Beyond the Lamplight*, an impressive collection of 34 of his best stories. This is, along with the novel and the audio tape, a rather impressive portfolio of work.

I've had the pleasure of reading *Flute Songs* and about 45 of Don's short stories; I think so far my favorite of his tales would be "Walkie-Talkie," and "Hopkins House." I asked him if he had any particular favorites among his body of work.

"Oh, well I think I would have to agree with you, at least about 'Walkie-Talkie.' I'm not at all that sure how valuable self-criticism is. I don't know that I'm on safe ground trying to assess my own work -- it's probably for readers to do that, but certainly 'Walkie-Talkie' is my favorite of my stories. I think it's probably the scariest thing I've ever written. I enjoy reading it at bookstores and conventions. I would think that 'Snow Cancellations' might be a good second choice."

I've had a great deal of success with that story. I originally sold that to 2AM, and it was reprinted in *Best New Horror*, and believe it or not, adapted for *Weekly Reader*, an excellent opportunity for me to twist and warp heaven-only-knows how many young minds all at one time. It was also translated into French recently. I'm inclined to like 'Mulligan's Fence,' which was from that *Lemon Drops and Other Horrors* collection. That was reprinted in *Best New Horror* 5. I rather like 'Blue Luke,' one of those *Four Shadowings* stories.

"Also, you mentioned the humor aspect before. No one can really do that like my dear departed friend, Bob Bloch. I don't even try to, but if humor shows up in any of my tales it's certainly in 'One Night Strand,' that spider story in the collection *Four Shadowings*. And I recently wrote a story called 'Sheets' that I sold to the magazine

Lore, actually set in my grandmother's house in Texas -- a place that always kind of spooked me a bit as a kid. In the story, I moved the house actually to Vermont because I needed it to be snowing at the time. But yes, I'd probably say at the top of the list 'Walkie-Talkie.'"

I asked Don what he thought the future held:

"Oh well, I have a great deal more writing I want to do. I tend to make lists and jot down notes. Right now I have a list of something like twenty short story ideas that I just haven't had any time to work on yet. So, I hope to do a great deal of more short story writing, and no doubt some more novel writing as well. I will no doubt continue to write articles about H.P. Lovecraft and other people in the field of dark literature, and all-in-all I hope to remain in the horror field for a good many years to come."

Since I conducted this interview, Don has sold stories to a few more markets, including a new Barnes & Noble anthology, and he is hard at work creating more of his dark little children. Initial sales of *Flute Songs* have been strong, and it has received a number of positive reviews. We are in almost daily contact via the wonderful world of E-mail, and in fact Don has his own topic on Genie. Folks on Genie can drop by Don's topic under AUTHORS - B in the SFRT (SCIENCE FICTION ROUND TABLE) where all the latest Burleson news is posted.

He also has a Web site at <http://home.navisoft.com/dburleson/index.htm>. *Flute Song* is available from Black Mesa Press, P.O. Box 416, Merrimack, NH 03054-0416,

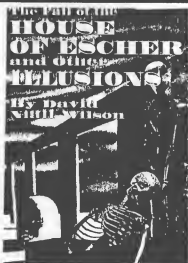
for \$9.95 plus \$2.00 p&h.

To conclude, I quote from Don's introduction to *Lemon Drops and Other Horrors*: "The stories in this collection are a few of the strange things that have happened to me along the way, my responses to a few of the dusky whisperings that have lured me off the better-lighted paths and into places where nightmares live. For me, this is as it should be, because well-lighted paths tend to lead primarily to boredom. I think one can have a more interesting life stepping off the path from time to time and exploring the darkness. Don't you?"

Ido, and I'm enjoying walking that ill-lighted path created by Donald R. Burleson. Thanks, Mr. Hyde.

...Quite frankly I'm just tired of playing dumb games with the New York mafia....

—DONALD R. BURLESON



THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF ESCHER AND OTHER ILLUSIONS
by David Niall Wilson
Macabre, Inc., 1995
92 pp, \$5.95

Illustrated by H.E. Fassl & David Grilla
Review by Andrea Locke

THIS COLLECTION SHOWS a lot of courage on the part of David Niall Wilson. He takes themes that many would consider taboo, and he tackles them forcefully and thoughtfully. This is an important anthology by an author whose stature in the field is growing.

The driving theme of this collection of seven stories is centered around religion. It seems a theme close to the heart of Wilson, and he deals with it in a manner that is never insulting or slight, a task that is difficult on such a sensitive issue. Three of the seven stories deal directly with the Christian religion, and all of them are effective in all the ways I choose to judge the power of a work of fiction. They all moved me emotionally, which is what a good story is supposed to do.

First and foremost among the stories is "A Candle Lit in Sunlight" which is a reprint and was recognized for its importance six years ago when the late Karl Wagner included it in his *Year's Best Horror* anthology for DAW Books. The depth of this work is amazing. Wilson uses the style of the Holy Bible to write another version of part of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Here, the "Book of the Gospel, According to Judas Iscariot" is revealed to us. The poetry of the King James version is all here, but to tell us a part of the story sprung from the fertile imagination of David Wilson. In this version, Mary Magdalene is a vampire, cursed by Satan, and the torture this curse exacts on all concerned is painful to witness. This is a story sensitive to its source and

respectful of The Story—there is no blasphemy here. I hope that the reprinting of "A Candle Lit in Sunlight" brings it before a wider audience so that it can be recognized as the genre classic it is.

Nearly equal in power to "Candle" is "On the Road to Damascus." This is the story of Saul of Tarsus, as told to us by David Wilson. He does a turn on history to show us what happened to splinter Christianity, to show yet another side of the greatest evil, the Adversary Who, having failed to turn Christ on the wrong path, makes an attempt to subvert the ways of those who would follow Him. The clarity of the writing, the convincing way the author recreates a historic place, all of this is there to showcase Wilson's talent. This is writing at its most powerful and effective.

In "Miracles in the Night," we experience the boredom that dogs an immortal (a vampire), and the hunger that drives him. In this case, the narrator follows a vague urge to the waterfront where he encounters a prophet, one who does not fear him and who is filled with a wisdom and an inner peace that succeeds in calming even the lust of one such as the vampire. The dialogue that passes between the monster and the self-named holy man is intriguing, one which tweaks the imagination of the reader in much the same way it moves the monster taking part in it. Again, this story edges along lines that tread religious paths, but vaguely and namelessly. It's a provocative piece.

Strangely, for its work from which the volume takes its name, the least pleasing story for me was "The Fall of the House of Escher." It deals with concepts derived from some of the ones touched upon by Poe, but seems to take its cues more from that later master, H.P. Lovecraft. The characterizations of the only two players is well rounded and makes most of their actions plausible. However, the way the concept of other-worldliness that warps and bends what we know of as "reality" just didn't quite gel for me. Wilson tries very hard to grasp this intangible theme and make it whole for us, but he just doesn't succeed, at least not by my own definitions. It is a good attempt, though, and this story will cause one to ponder such things, so it succeeds on that level, at any rate.

This collection has much to offer. There is real horror here, as described graphically in "Yours, the Vengeance," a tale of man's rape of Mother Earth and the (sadly) impossible retribution. And there is great tenderness here, too, in "Sparkling Eyes," another tale of the wonders of the natural world and the deeper emotions we know as love. Dave Wilson is a writer on the move, who dares to face themes most writers shrug off as too confrontational or

too dangerous. Do yourself a favor and buy this book. This is about as close as I can come to guaranteeing everyone that they will enjoy the experience of reading a work as much as I did.



SOMETHING HAUNTS US ALL
by Brian A. Hopkins
Macabre, Inc., 1995
100 pp, \$5.95

Illustrated by Donald Schank
Review by Andrea Locke

THE AUTHOR'S INITIALS spell out BAH, but this collection is hardly humbug. In fact, I was very pleased with it—even, I must say, impressed. This was the Macabre Inc. book I knew the least about going in, since I have rarely been exposed to Hopkins' work. He has appeared quite often, mainly in the small presses, but I had not happened upon much of his work. My loss, which is made up, in part, by this collection.

Like all the Macabre Inc books thus far, production values are excellent. I was not as impressed with the graphics here as I was with the others (*Fugue Devil* by Mr. Rainey and *The Fall of the House of Escher* by David Niall Wilson), though, for I don't think Schank's cover is all that attractive; it's competent—workmanlike—but not inspired. The cover looks more appropriate for an interior spot illustration than as something to attract the attention of a prospective buyer. My only real quibble, though.

The meat of this book is, of course, Mr. Hopkins' fiction. He's a very talented writer, with a knack for effective and pointed characterisation. Many writers plod along, giving us various locks at aspects of their own personalities, obviously so in some cases. But Hopkins' characters are unique and real, despite the weirdness into which he places them. Hopkins' puppets come across not as puppets,

but as truly human.

"Scarecrow's Dream," the first of the book's seven stories, is a good traditional chill. The protagonist is Carey Singer, a young lady escaping a failed relationship who finds herself, after her auto skids off the snowy road, alone in a secluded and abandoned farmhouse. It's a familiar start to what would be a familiar story if not for Hopkins' talented utilisation of conversation and emotional appeal. He takes what should be a threadbare plot and weaves a truly fine story that moves poetically along to a satisfying, but an achingly sad conclusion.

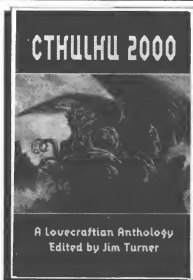
The next story, "Gaffed," is my favorite story in the book. This one is reminiscent of some of the early efforts of Dennis Etchison. Again, we are treated to an intense characterisation that is carved out for us like a face being etched out of raw wood with a razor sharp blade—and by a master craftsman. Hopkins delivers a nameless Joe who knows the twisted ways of the carry sideshow and rigged amusements as only one who has participated in them. He leads us along, letting us slowly into the inner workings of this man's mind, leaving little clues along the way toward an ending we cannot fathom until it happens, all the while seeing the portrait Hopkins has so lovingly wrought. This boy is good....

"Night Bite," one of the longer stories, is also the strangest. This story is set apart from the other, more subtle pieces by a weirdness that is more strongly supernatural than the others. Here, we are given the tortures of demons which may be swimming in the feverish mind of the protagonist, but which are more likely the sufferings of a damned soul. Again, Brian Hopkins shows how good writing is performed: we can see the rooms, we can flinch at the pain, we can feel the heat, we can smell the coppery tang of blood on the wind.

However, and for all the effectiveness of material like "Night Bite," Hopkins' principal talent lies in the subtleties of his writing. "To Walk Among the Living" is a unique work that illustrates, in a believable way, the horror of supernatural possession. He reasons with the reader, letting us know that such things are logical, that they follow patterns which make sense, which let us conclude that the story is true, that make us afraid of such things. Not many writers can do that for me; but Hopkins has done it here.

There really isn't a bad story among the collection. I enjoyed some of the stories more than others, and one of them failed to impress me, but all of them showed me that Brian Hopkins is a writer who will be heard from again and again, whether his career takes him toward more traditional professional outlets, or whether he chooses to remain a fixture in the small and semi-professional presses. At any rate, what this collection makes me hope for is a novel—he's already shown he can create

characters as real as the people you truly know. Perhaps more realistic than you'd like to acknowledge.



CTHULHU 2000

Edited by Jim Turner

Arkham House, 1995

413 pp, \$24.95

Review by Bob Eggleton

Cover art by Stephen Mark Rainey

AS AN AVID reader of works Lovecraftian, it's always a pleasure to find a collection of weird tales that rise far above the morass of hackneyed Cthulhu-ish yarns perpetuated by lots of small presses not "seriously" into the subject matter. Arkham House *should* be the premier publisher of the Lovecraftian tale, after all, no? Well, Arkham House editor Jim Turner hereby presents a number of stories that largely define the flavor of the post-HPL mythos; all reprints, but mostly well-chosen and several of which passed me by on their initial printings.

Most notably, the lead story, "The Barrens," by F. Paul Wilson is a gem that originally appeared in *Lovecraft's Legacy* in 1990, which I unfortunately missed reading. One of the most atmospheric and eerie of all cosmic-based horror stories, "The Barrens" impressed me, but did not surprise me, simply because Mr. Wilson has become one of my all-time favorite authors of the supernatural horror tale. He opens the story with a description of the New Jersey pine barrens that is in itself enough to give one a good case of the creepy crawlies, and the events that transpire within them become a truly nerve-rending experience. It's a rare tale that can awaken the most primitive inner feelings of dread, especially when dealing with the horrors "out there," and with the flourish of a virtuoso, Wilson evokes an authentic sense of wonder that few writers other than HPL himself have achieved.

One of the most unique stories here might be Basil Copper's "Shaft Number 247," a

story of the aftermath of an unnamed apocalypse, a tale of survival in labyrinthine underground bunkers, darkly claustrophobic and surrounded by unknown things "outside." Copper's characters seem to have evolved from the world of Orwell's *1984*, while the unspoken promise of a world beyond the shafts lures them much as did Sanctuary to the inhabitants of the dome city in *Logan's Run*. Unlike the sunlit outer world of Logan's future, that which lurks beyond the shafts in Copper's story is considerably less benign.

Fat Face by Michael Shea, is one of my personal favorite modern mythos yarns, originally published as a chapbook in 1987 and later reprinted in St Martin's Press' *Year's Best Fantasy & Horror*. This tale reveals how a 20th century-bred shoggoth might woo a lass of his choosing and what happens upon the consummation of their affair. The leading lady, a prostitute, is sympathetic and tragic, and Shea's prose bounces between the poetic and the playful. Quite a departure from anything HPL, probably would have imagined—yet wonderfully true to the spirit of the classic mythos tale.

Another favorite is T.E.D. Klein's "Black Man With A Horn," the narrator of which is revealed to be an actual member of the original "Lovecraft Circle," and who comes face to face with something that HPL and gang portended in their weird work. Subtle and engaging, "Black Man" also conveys a kind of xenophobia reminiscent of HPL himself—rather surprising for a work originally penned in 1980. The final image of the story—that which comes about as the result of the narrator's digging into a number of seemingly unrelated events—is jarring and lingering in its effect.

In a parallel world, where Lovecraft never died of stomach cancer and in fact still resides in Providence...that's where we find ourselves in Gahan Wilson's "HPL," one of those stories I had not previously encountered. Naturally, Lovecraft's fiction is revealed to be a disguise for a deeper truth, and only a master such as Wilson could have pulled this one off with such panache. Alternately touching, hilarious and chilling, the story tells of how one young devotee of Lovecraft's stories comes to meet "Grandpa," and their subsequent exploration of those dark secrets that you just know hide both inside and outside of the mind of ye old gen.

Fred Chappell's wonderful tale, "The Adder" is found again here, after having been originally published in *Deathdream*, and subsequently in *Datlow & Windling's Year's Best Fantasy & Horror*, and Chappell's own collection, *More Shapes Than One*. Here, a somewhat bumbling collector of books happens across a unique handwritten copy of *The Necronomicon*, an apparently bewitched copy that eats any book it contacts. The method by which this is achieved must be read to be

believed, and like Gahan Wilson, Fred Chappell capably turns the ridiculous into the sublime. Select passages of the story have been known to send certain editors of certain horror magazines into fits of wonderful delirium – and since the issue of *Deathrealm* in which “The Adder” appeared has long been sold out, *Cthulhu 2000* is as good a place as any to check it out for yourself.

Not only one of the best Lovecraftian stories I’ve ever read, but one of the best horror stories I think I’ve ever read would be Thomas Ligotti’s “Last Feast of the Harlequin,” a story so unique in both concept and telling that my admiration for Ligotti’s talent has leaped significantly (this from one who has always held Ligotti’s work in high esteem indeed). In a classic story of a stranger in an unusual town, the atmosphere of dread – and the merely surreal – is unequaled by any tale I can think of except perhaps Lovecraft’s own “The Shadow Over Innsmouth.”

Similarly, Ramsey Campbell’s “The Faces at Pine Dunes” evokes a dreamlike, surreal sense of terror, made all the more effective by featuring a youthful protagonist. In this case, the young character is not naive, the main shortcoming of so many tales of horror revolving around the perceptions of the younger set. Instead, the chills Campbell evokes come from both the character’s incomplete understanding of the adult world and a growing understanding of the more horrific world beyond mundane, day-to-day life.

A more overt style of humor than those tales I’ve already mentioned is not absent from these pages. Lawrence Watt-Evans offers a somewhat amusing tale called “Pickman’s Modern,” the most effective parts being the humorous insights into the world of online services. Esther Friesner’s “Love’s Eldritch Ichor” is only partially successful at generating laughs, most of them via the use of one-liners drawn from various HPL titles.

Surprisingly disappointing were Harlan Ellison’s “On the Slab,” a story that opens promisingly about the discovery of a giant, prehistoric man, but that devolves into something Clive Barker might have delivered on a bad day; and, most surprisingly of all, Roger Zelazny’s “24 Views of Mt. Fuji, by Hokusai,” a terribly dry, if artfully written piece of prose that seems to go absolutely nowhere – a fact made all the more distasteful since the late Mr. Zelazny has always been one of my favorite fantasy authors.

All in all, though, *Cthulhu 2000* rates quite highly, and would be especially valuable to someone only moderately versed in the world of the Mythos. The best of the best in the “modern” world of the Great Old Ones is to be found here, and the packaging is typical high-quality Arkham House, with a beautiful cover illo by Bob Eggleton.



BLOOD TIES
By Karen E. Taylor
Zebra, 1995
347 pp, \$4.99

Review by
Andrea Locke

I’M NOT WHAT one would call a connoisseur of vampire fiction. I usually find them boring as all hell, as a matter of fact, mainly because vampires have been

around doing the same old thing for such a long time. We have evil vampires, we have romantic vampires, we have vampires who enjoy being bad, we have vampires who hate being cursed. You name it, it’s been done. I must admit, I probably wouldn’t have even read *Blood Ties* had not Mr. Editor packed it into a box and sent it to me. However, the cover of this book appealed to me immediately; it’s an artist’s rendering of a Glamour Shot of a pair of unbelievably sexy vampires; exactly the kind of thing I usually despise but was mysteriously drawn to in this instance. Why that is, I’m not sure, but chalk one up for Zebra’s art department; I’m sure they’re hoping that the effect it had on me will do the same for readers browsing their local bookstore shelves.

As for the novel itself...what can I say? It’s a tale of incredibly sexy vampires who pretty much enjoy being bloodsuckers, and who, basically, are no different from the rest of us, except that they work the night shift and have eclectic appetites. They live, they love, they fuck, they work, they worry – yeah, they worry a lot. Kind of like *Melrose Place* on plasma. There’s even a “secret” society of vampires whose domicile is not a Transylvanian castle but a ritzy hotel with a certain amount of customized architecture to accommodate the vampire’s unique living habits. Vampires are being killed, it seems; their remains are found all around town, apparently having been somehow lured into daylight, which, as we all know, is *not* a good thing to have happen to you if you’re a vampire.

Our heroes, a vampire named Mitch who very conveniently used to be a cop, and his vampire lover Deirdre, determine that this disturbing trend must stop. Using every means at their disposal, they begin tracking down clue after clue, and—in between numerous erotic trysts to relieve the stress—soon begin to find that the antagonist is very likely someone in their own secret society.

The race the climax is intense, and I must say the pacing was exhilarating—up to the point of climax, which was so abrupt and essentially simple, that I must confess to feeling a bit short-changed. I mean, if things could be wrapped up so easily, then it would appear that the only

reason for all the angst was to precipitate lots of vampire sex.

I admire Karen Taylor’s prose, though; it’s witty and engaging, so comfortable to read that it feels almost like having an exciting story told to you by a good friend. I haven’t read any of Ms. Taylor’s other work, though I understand there are two other novels featuring Mitch and Deirdre. If you like mystery/romance/action-adventure with flings, then I’d say pick up *Blood Ties*. If you like effectively told, *tasteful* erotica, pick up *Blood Ties*. If you like vampires in general, pick up *Blood Ties*.

If you don’t like any of those things, better read something else.

THE BLOOD COUNTESS

By Andrei Codrescu
Simon & Schuster, 1995

Review by Herb Greenhouse

THIS NOVEL IS a story that has been told before, in one sense, though never in quite this manner, and at the same time it is a new tale—one of modern and post-modern Europe, a tale of our times. It is the combined story of Countess Elizabeth Bathory and that of her descendant, Mr. Drake Bathory-Keresztur, who is attempting to convince a Judge of his own guilt in a case of murder. Of course, he is not a murderer, not on his own—it is the influence of Elizabeth Bathory that has caused his woe—the ties between long-dead Countess and modern journalist are at fault.

Historically, this book is beautiful. There are anecdotal passages from Bathory’s life, spanning the years of her childhood and on into her eventual imprisonment and death. Included are battles with the followers of Martin Luther, infatuations with devices of torture, a fascination with blood and alchemy—from which she has been promised a secret will come forth at the hand of her scribe and companion – the modern Mr. Bathory-Keresztur’s direct ancestor—a secret that will bring her eternal youth and beauty.

Both of this book’s two stories are fascinating in and of themselves, but if there is a fault in the structure of the novel, it is in the transitions. Modern, post-communist Europe and ancient history. Jarring differences.

The modern story is the more intriguing of the two. The story of The Blood Countess, as she was, and is, known, is not a new one. There might be new perspectives here, but the story of her descendant is fresh. It is possible that much of the potential power of this work is dampened by the switching of viewpoints, past to present. The modern segment is so compelling that long stints of narrative on Bathory’s life seem to intrude, somehow lessening the overall impact.

The prose is sensational, and the story innovative and unique. In a world of pat plots and stale innuendo, this work stands out as

both memorable and poignant. There is a lot to be learned from Elizabeth Bathory's life, and from the unique perspective that Codrescu brings to it, and there is a great deal to learn of history from the research and thought that is represented in the novel. Highly recommended. Four of five tombstones.

VISION QUESTS

Dawn Albright & Sandra Hutchinson, editors

Angelus Press, 1995

130 pp, \$9.95

Review by Andrea Locke

I ENJOY A book like *Vision Quests*. It's a beautiful little package of a book with its glossy cover featuring what I suppose is an eagle or seahawk done in the style of North-western Indian artwork. Whoever designed the covers did a wonderful job; the book just begs to be picked up and looked at.

Vision Quests is a theme anthology: the theme being that all the stories are, according to the subtitle, "science fiction and fantasy tales of shamanism." Sometimes themed anthos bore the hell out of me, and I feared such from this title, as I interpreted the core of the book to be fairly limited. I had no need to fear.

There are seven stories (plus a short poem) inside, and picking the best tale is pretty much an impossible job. But I think I did have a favorite, and that one was "The Healer" by Susan J. Kroupa. This story is a reprint from a *Writer's of the Future* volume, but I hadn't encountered it. This tale deals with a post-apocalyptic world in which the Native American tribes have survived, many of them having returned to what appears to be a Southwestern location. The principle protagonist of the story is a medicine man who has done his best to gather what he can of Indian legend and culture, including the fleeting ability to heal by way of the power of a magic crystal. During the course of the story he saves a baby who comes to be a rival, a girl whose power to heal surpasses his own. What could easily have become a typical story of conflict is instead woven into something full of emotion and love. This is a great story.

K.D. Wentworth treats us to "The Turquoise Horse". This one is a story of redemption and self discovery, a journey into a magical realm by a young Navajo man. The language in this story is used to envelope the reader in a fantasy one can believe in. Ms. Wentworth takes us on a journey astride her own kind of horse, and I was sad to see the ride come to an end. I liked this story a lot.

David Niall Wilson rears his head with "Morning Star and Bloody Knife." This young man's work is appearing everywhere I look, and reading this story it's not hard to understand why editors are enamored of his wordsmithery. If you've ever wondered just

why Custer's relief never arrived to reinforce his doomed forces at The Little Big Horn, read no further than this tale to learn the answer. Here, we are introduced to Bloody Knife, an Indian scout in the employ of the legendary murdering General Custer. But Bloody Knife is much more than just a scout; he's a shaman of great power and deeply troubled by the fate of his people. What he does just across the ridge from the Little Big Horn will explain all. In a most horrific manner.

The darkest and most disturbing story in the volume is Charlee Jacob's "A Quantum Shaman For Her Time". In this one, we find a research park who has landed a most terrifying study subject: an Indian woman who is, literally, obliterating herself bit by bloody bit. The reader is held as the story progresses and the woman slowly renders herself null as the scientists who study her seem to watch with some kind of detached (and disturbing) glee. The ending is unexpected and somehow satisfying. Charlee Jacob has been one of my favorites for some time now, and I think she's reached a new level of excellence.

Also included in *Vision Quests* are great stories by Vol Ranger, Diane de Avelle-Aree, and Judith Berman (whose story is reprinted from *Realms of Fantasy*). This little book is worth every cent of its cover price. If you want a great read and an attractive book to add to your bookshelves, I heartily recommend it.

PHANTOM WATERS

By Jessica Amanda Salmonson

Sasquatch Books, 1995

210 pp; U.S. \$14.95, Canada \$19.95

Review by Alex Johnson

PHANTOM WATERS COLLECTS stories from the Pacific Northwest, drawn together from a wide variety of sources, acknowledging both the rich history of the native Americans who have called that region home, and the spirit-haunted folklore, past and present, of all its peoples. The book is Seattle-based fantasist Jessica Amanda Salmonson's tribute to the spirit of her Cherokee-Yakama-Irish great-grandfather, credited for the author's "romantic disposition."

Whether snatches of legend or full-blown, complex narratives, the tales Salmonson has chosen to relate contain such universal, timeless themes as family loyalties versus the choices of the heart, the cost of revenge, and the price of maturation.

The Klamath legend "When the Woman Chief Was Young" exemplifies some of these themes, with a feminist twist. Liao rules the demons of the underworld, Skell the sun and sky. Both yearn for Chao, the fearless, beautiful heir to the headship of the Klamath nation. A harrowing war between these gods yields dismemberment and destruction in its wake, as Liao spitefully hails ruin on the nation. But

Chao will emerge to lead the people on her own terms, with neither deity as spouse.

In the book's standout story, "Red Wolf's Daughter and Bloody Chief's Son," romance blossoms between two young people of warring tribes. The Blackfoot scion pledges to share the fate of his Nez Perce sweetheart, though she has sworn her life to a lake spirit in exchange for peace. The predictable tragic resolution rings a note of self-annihilating love that transcends death, a suitable nod to Romantic sentiment.

Many of the stories contain elements of the weird and macabre. "Ghoul John and the Corpse" relates the true account of a white naturalist of the 1830's, who justified his grave-robbing exploits in the name of science. In the story, Ghoul John steals the three-day-old corpse of a Chinook woman, perfectly preserved in a cedar canoe. Salmonson makes the shameful context clear, telling of picnic expeditions to collect baby Chinook skulls as decor.

In another true story, "The Woman Who Turned to Soap" bobs up in Western Washington's Lake Crescent; the water's unique conditions have preserved her body, solving a four-year old murder case. The author doesn't neglect the gruesome details either, as transportation shears off bits of the soapy body's face and extremities.

Several species of exotic monsters also populate the book. "The Changelings" concerns a creature called a Huluk, a hybrid beaver/porcupine who abducts children and transforms them into creatures like himself. The "Bone-Cleaner of Blue Lake" has a self-evident mission in life and performs it skillfully when trespassers encroach on his territory.

Salmonson uses a variety of framing techniques to convey the material, but these methods serve more to open the stories to a wider audience, rather than filter them to reflect a single authorial ego. She combines a crystal-clear writing style with a soulful quality that brings these old legends to absorbing life. This book has wide-ranging appeal that recommends it to lovers of fantasy light and dark, folklorists, historians—anybody who likes a good story well told.

HOT BLOOD #6: STRANGER BY NIGHT

Edited by Jeff Gelb and Michael Garrett

Pocket Books, 1995

318 pp, \$5.99

Review by Alex Johnson

THE LATEST VOLUME of "The Original Erotic Horror Anthology," *Hot Blood 6: Stranger By Night* provides a good sampling of stories from this slipperiest of subgenres. The success of the present volume points to a value of the whole series—strong emphasis on the "erotic." There's something in these 18 tales of orgasmic dread to satisfy most tastes.

(Continued on Page 54)

ON THE LATE TRAIN THROUGH TEXAS

By J. N. Williamson

The man who sat down to face me could have been any man... every man... yet I placed him. Knew him. And I knew that I did not like him. I could not stand him.

How did I -- how could I -- know this?

T

HERE WAS SOMETHING so familiar about the man who sat down across from me on the train that I spoke to him immediately.

When his eyes appeared to avoid mine -- I decided it wasn't what they call a "studied evasion" -- and he sort of settled down into himself, I wondered why I hadn't said more. I mean, there was nothing really forbidding to him, actually; he didn't glare at me. But since he'd looked familiar and I'm sociable enough that I generally smile or at least nod to anyone whose gaze meets mine, I gave a few seconds thought to the question of why I *hadn't* gone ahead and said hello.

Then I had it.

A part of it.

The man opposite me, his shoulders slumped so that he was somewhat pinched into his seat and left to stare at nothing at all, was *not* familiar for the reason that I'd met him personally somewhere in the past.

He was familiar in the odd way that famous people are "familiar" when we see them in person for the first time.

--Or perhaps, I thought, people who experienced a fleeting instant of celebrity but never quite did again whatever it was that stamped their faces forever on our minds.

I was taking a train because I am one of those unreconstructed, neurotic men who hasn't overcome the fear of flying. Usually when I'm just chatting with someone, I say -- and it isn't a lie -- that my line permits me the luxury of taking my time in getting from one city or state to another. But that story held up better a few years back when there was still some luxury to be enjoyed while crawling across the

country's face like a bit of food in the belly of a persistent bug. Sure, there's a dining car where a man like me can go and idle away the hours. But I'm an unregenerated smoker, too -- and then there's the matter of relative loneliness.

It doesn't *feel* like luxury if there's nobody else boarding the train with expressions of high anticipation, no one else in the dining car to drink with and nobody waiting who believes the story you give them about why you're not flying in -- especially when they don't look remotely impressed when you mention the fabulous t-bone you were eating as the late train left Texarkana and headed for Garland, then Dallas.

I had come back from that solitary meal just seven or eight minutes before the man sat down opposite from me and it was probably the fact that there were other seats available that made me believe, at first, he wanted to talk. I still don't have any idea why he chose to ride with me, though I'll probably spend a long time now trying to understand it. Maybe I merely appeared middle-aged and harmless. I do remember distinctly wondering where he'd come from: I mean, I would have noticed if the train had stopped while I was dining. I couldn't swear to that, of course. But the thought I had at the time was that the man had either simply materialized, or come forward from another car, possibly intending to have something to eat but then changing his mind. God knows there's no such thing as a smoking car today! For all I know, he spotted someone at a table whom he had to avoid, then retreated to where I was sitting to position himself with his back to that person.

Good heavens, does this kind of speculation always take you along such paranoid

paths?

He wore the most ordinary sort of clothing, neither expensive nor cheap-looking, "generic" has the right sound. He had on a suit that made me think of what they give prisoners who have served their time and are free to leave, in films. His hair was even like that, I recall, nothing in the cut to suggest a stylist had ever seen it. It was graying with a hint of a persistent wave making it appear brushed to the side and the hair was receding a bit.

The face was familiar right away, as I've said. Not lined, but still the face of a man somewhere in his fifties --

And pale. No: no, not pale. Pasty. As if he hadn't been out in sunshine for years. No, wait! Like he hadn't been outside, period, for a long while.

It's very hard to say why he was familiar at first glance because I think he had basically looked like just any man at all before he... did... whatever made him so damned recognizable. I managed a covert kind of glance at him now and then, clearing my throat and shifting my weight; even his height was hard to judge because of the way he was squinched-in -- but while I was pecking at him, and feeling like an idiot doing it, I remembered the way he had looked right before he sat down: mindful, alert, or even watchful. Like a man who kept his eyes open, knew the score, and was both brighter and more impressive for it yet also (I sensed) more world-weary than anyone I'd ever seen. Not physically tired, in my opinion, but perhaps so heavily burdened with the information he alone possessed that he didn't know where to turn or what to say to anyone.

At the same moment I added to my groundless speculations the notion that if

the man started to talk he might never be able to stop. I realized, to my own mild surprise, that I was not in the least sympathetic. I did not like him, let me emphasize that. I didn't like or trust him, and with a similar absence of fair play or reasonableness to the way I'd formed my first impressions of him.

It would be ten minutes into our unusual conversation before it occurred to me to wonder how it was possible I'd felt drawn to this individual at the same time that I couldn't stand the man.

I began it with an introduction. "I'm Simpson," I offered. "Carl Simpson. Videotapes." I leaned forward fractionally, my hand and arm lifting from my knee just enough that I wouldn't be embarrassed whether he left his arms curled around himself or chose to clasp my hand. "Stopping in Big D, then going on to Lubbock."

His head moved so he could see my face but very little happened to the eyes that appeared only minimally polite, disinterested, and either so guarded or devoid of spirit -- or passion -- that I couldn't read a thing in them. I wondered if he didn't quite know what Big D, Lubbock, or videotapes were. The hand and arm didn't budge but he gave me a silent nod --

And the disturbing gaze (was he sizing me up?) didn't leave my face.

I pressed it. "You going that far, or getting off at Garland?"

The answer was surprising. "I don't know yet."

He glanced by me, toward the compartment door. Belatedly, I registered the same rumble of wheels clattering over a rough patch on the tracks which he'd heard; then he wasn't looking at me any more and I felt as if I'd been disregarded.

Who is he? I wondered, increasingly uncomfortable. Now I was certain he looked familiar! The vocal pattern -- soft but carrying, tinged by a natural whine; unrushed yet suggestive of a capacity for spewing out a verbal torrent -- was one I'd heard before.

Then I had a clue to what was different about him when I perceived what was wrong with his eyes.

They weren't barren of passion but peculiarly fixed on some moment or fleeting span of moments in the past -- fixed there permanently so that it was as if the fellow existed *then* and *now* simultaneously, and with such obsessive fervor

that he not only took what had gone wrong with him but extended it into the future. It was like he'd done or had been a significant part of past events so terribly important that they, and he, transcended time; straddled it.

As though he possessed some awful obligation to carry his yesterdays with him for every second he existed, and might not abandon them even when he was forever dead. A bit melodramatically, reasonlessly, I thought, *Perhaps he won't be.*

"Simpson," he said, "you think you know me, don't you?"

I experienced sharp trauma in my eye sockets, because I looked back at him with such suddenness. The train roared across another jagged, rugged stretch of track, and, feeling it pitch sideways slightly, I used the unnerving distraction as an excuse for not replying.

"Well, you *don't*," the familiar man

"...We see red on a man's chest, oozing between the fingers he puts up, and if we heard a shot, we assume a bullet struck him. We see graves...and we assume bodies are in them..."

said flatly. He stared straight into my eyes and it was as if his entire head ballooned, because I saw his every feature with unforgettable clarity: the expanse of white forehead, the nose that was long and tended to bulb at the end, thin lips appearing incapable of humor, the whole face dwindling to a boyish chin that seemed queerly hairless and pasty like the rest of his skin. "No one does." I think his eyes narrowed; I know they became discomfitingly intense but whether with some true, vagrant compassion for a salesman named Carl Simpson, I could not say. "It's pretty important to you to acknowledge that you don't know me."

"Well, I don't, do I?" I asked reasonably. I didn't think it was a threat or that, if it was one, it was exactly directed at me.

Something shifted right behind the knowing eyes. I think he liked it that I hadn't quite shown my sense of fear. That was when my apprehension started to grow, however, and stay. "Men our age have seen a lot of things and sometimes we believe we've seen things we haven't," he said. "Not really."

"True enough," I said, though I had no idea what he meant.

"We see red on a man's chest, oozing between the fingers he puts up, and if we heard a shot, we assume a bullet struck him. We see graves," he went on, drawing a labored breath, "and we assume bodies are in them -- bodies that match the names on the white stones."

I waited to hear what more he was willing to say but he only turned his face to peer out the window. Now it was night and the countryside I saw with a swift glance to my left was just an oily, attenuated black smear against the wall of the speeding train. Other people in our partly-occupied car were as still as if they'd died where they sat. Some were asleep, more going. I realized that the man seated across from me had a round, black bag at his feet, and I thought of cartoon anarchists with bombs. Labels adhered to the skin of the bag with information so foreign even the letters weren't familiar. I wondered if it was Russian.

"That television," he said, much as I might have referred to a mystifying new variation of rap music. "It used to be like looking through this window, you know? You tune it and tune it, and you may get some light -- the glimpse of a face...but what have you seen, really?"

I didn't understand for a moment. Then, distantly, I did. "I suppose it depended on what you *wanted* to see." I pondered briefly. "TV does a lot, doesn't it, with camera angles, special effects."

"Good, very good!" His slender, pasty hand sneaked out to pat my knee and I felt it flinch. But this was my own fault, I reminded myself. He was no image on television. I had sought to find out why he was familiar and perhaps he was getting ready to explain.

It wasn't his fault that I just didn't want to know anymore.

"Take the overthrow of communism," he continued. "Half the Americans didn't dare believe it, half wanted to, so they did. So far, they've had the easy part. Those who couldn't believe look like they went all wrong, now; but half of them were afraid they'd be tricked into a war -- precisely like half the Americans who automatically accepted *glasnost*. Now: where were the real people who wanted peace? What was the truth, and where does it lie today? How do all those halves add

ART BY LEW HARTMAN



up, and were the *right* Russians added in at all?" The man's thin smile contained no charm, no humor. "Communism's a tough subject, Simpson. It's never been anything you understand just by reading a newspaper or a book."

My gaze trickled toward the labels on his bag. "You sound like you've done more than read to grasp the subject."

He opened his mouth wide. I don't know if he meant to laugh, or shout, or if it was merely a yawn; but when the train whistle screamed, he snapped his jaws together as though in startlement, and -- *I placed him*. Just for another moment frozen again in memory I was seeing this stranger who wasn't quite a stranger to everybody, exactly how I had seen and remembered him -- because he'd reacted to the unexpected shriek of the whistle by not just pressing his lips together but his odd eyes, too. Perhaps any shockingly loud sound that was not entirely expected had made him react that way for decades.

I recalled then that he was supposed to be dead and buried. That was about the instant the train came to a shuddering pause in Garland. Half the people in our car tore themselves from their reveries and chairs as if a sleeping period had ended and they were conscious again to renew whatever commitment the living have to the conventions of time. (*We assume bod-*

ies are in them....) Some of the people got off, but I couldn't. I was going all the way to Dallas, and beyond.

Then the car felt oddly emptied; drained. I noticed nobody boarding during our brief stop.

Having changed his mind about continuing with his comment he wasn't staring straight at me, yet I realized he was the person who, caught in the act of death by unnumbered millions, looked unremittently back at all of us. I had to remind myself the brush of his fingertips on my knee had been real, solid, and that helped -- though I knew if he truly lived, he might yet be more dangerous. His eyes were those of Fitzgerald's T.J. Eckleburg and peered "out of no face," but brooded persistently "over the solemn dumping ground."

I said, "I don't think I know you" with as little variation in my voice as I could (particularly on the word "think"). I waited till I imagined some comprehension was clicking in his mind with the sound of a bolt snapping home. "I wonder if, in a way, you're trying to make Wolfe wrong and go home again."

"Home?" The man laughed audibly.

The effect was to relieve his appearance of coiled tension, and I had a minute glimpse of an uprooted and fatherless boy who had not succeeded in fitting in well with any set of normal circumstances but might, a few

times, have longed to.

He reached down, pulled the black bag into his lap. He hadn't glanced down to get it.

"I thought he wasn't going to get there before they had to move me somewhere else," he said. The whine of the accent came from the south, the east, other places, the world; it was a democratic melting pot of a voice. "He made it, though. I thought we pulled it all off pretty good." His slender fingers worked a zipper without looking and the sound made me think of sitting up close to watch a stripper remove her fake stage dress. "It was simple when the cameras turned to film them subduing him. They got me out of there before the television people turned the cameras back. What they gave me helped; it knocked me out for a while."

"Where'd they take you then?" I asked. He was frightened of the answer so I put another one out of the air. "Who's in your grave?"

"There're a lot of patriotic men. Lots die." He appeared impatient with that topic, made my heart plummet by showing me he had heard my original question. "There was no rush, no search. I was supposed to be dead." A shrug. "It looked like I'd certainly proved myself so I was sent back to the Soviets. I was supposed to have a really vital assignment then."

"They double-crossed you?" I blurted. From the corner of one eye I recognized the movement of his hand dipping into the round black bag, and I tensed everywhere.

The fragmented laugh came again. "Some terms don't mean anything at times," he said, "and aren't really fair. The man who can say when everything began can be king — dead, but king. The point is, I had no way to communicate once everybody started dropping." A tiny, lopsided grin showed. "One of the things they did that was really smart was holding off on terminating most of my primary superiors. After that, the world began changing."

"Gorbachev?" I inquired. His hand was deep inside the bag and all I saw were some clothes. "Yeltsin?"

"Before that," he told me, "but the principle's the same. Look, there's no disassembled rifle in here." He demonstrated that was the truth by drawing a flat, rectangular object from the bag. He rested it on his knees without looking at it. "I've never been much damn good with them."

My breath caught again in my chest. It wasn't well-lit in the car now that the darkness lay over Texas, and I knew he didn't have any kind of gun I'd ever heard about in his hands but I couldn't be sure it wasn't some new high-tech weapon out of a spy movie. "Why," I said, choking out the words, "did they let you out now, or let

you come back to the United States?" I must have been temporarily mad to go on with the pursuit of information that could get armies of younger, sturdier men assassinated. Maybe, since I didn't know whether he was insane or not, I merely wanted to keep him talking.

"Well, almost anyone might show up in Russia now, go anywhere; it was impossible to keep me there any longer — or keep me quiet. And covert executions aren't as easy for the Russians as they once were." The man turned the object in his hands so he could see it, and I had a different unforgettable glimpse of his face. "Dead men have no homes, Simpson. They understood that letting me return to America was the only guarantee that I'd never get to speak my piece."

That was when he showed me — simply showed me — framed and faded photograph of a fair-skinned young mother and two rather ethereal looking little girls.

But I didn't take it. However it looks now, I did not accept it, not because he wanted it in safe-keeping when he realized the train had been boarded in Garland or for any other reason. I said I couldn't stand him, didn't I?

There was only sufficient time after the two of us heard the unhurried footsteps and scrape-and-clatter of the door to our car sliding back to ask him if he had done it or not. And for him to wave his mocking farewell to me.

Of course, there was no struggle. Probably struggles were for show at earlier, less world-weary points in one's life, or for different levels. I have to say I'm filled with admiration for the quickness, the efficiency, of the way everything happened then; it was all so very professional, how he was taken out, one of the men having the presence of mind to hold up a newspaper in front of that face that looks like the face of so many, many men — so many that I could never swear that his resemblance was actually that close.

And as for the suggestion that he wasn't just waving goodbye to me, that he was shaking his head as if in answer to a question of mine and using his fingers to indicate how many men did — whatever it was — well, that is absolutely ludicrous. Frankly, I'd have to say it's virtually paranoid. My line is merely selling videotapes between New Orleans and Dallas, providing a harmless means for ordinary people to make a permanent, flickering record of their harmless, ordinary daily lives, and a little television. Let's remember the man said I didn't know him and my response was, "Well, I don't, do I?" I'm just an aging, lonely traveling man who enjoys taking his time in getting from one place to another, and perhaps a little idle conversation.

Do you think it's possible I might have a cigarette now? One of my own?



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DEATH'S DOOR

(Continued from Page 37)



FANTASTIC WORLDS, Issue #40 * Edited by Scott Becker * 1644 South 11th St. West, Missoula, MT 59801 * 8.5"x11", b&w * \$5.00 single issue, \$15.00 three issue subscription, \$28.00 six issue subscription, U.S.

Review by Herb Greenhouse

IT IS VERY rare in the small press to find a magazine with a recognizable "voice." It is almost unheard of to recognize that voice in a premiere issue. **FANTASTIC WORLDS** is such a magazine, and if this first (sort of) issue, they establish themselves as a quality product with a future.

For fiction, we start with Jeff Vandermeer's "Ghost in the Machine." This is cyber-stuff with a flair of stylishness: a man, or what's left of him, trapped in another man's computer after death. He exists as a simulacrum, and he lives to serve. His relationship with his "master," the other "simulacrum," and a search for freedom bring you to a startling conclusion. Masterfully written. Vandermeer is an established talent, but one that is continually making new strides.

Next is possibly the best story of the issue, Charles M. Saplak's memorable "Window of Opportunity." Science fiction writers meet their future. What mark might we leave on those to come, and how will that mark be inscribed? Mr. Saplak has an answer that will touch the heart of any SF fan.

"Before the Clipper Comes," by Gregory FitzGerald, is a tale of future sexuality and midtwentieth trysts. It speaks of the price one might pay for his or her fondest dream, and the end a government might achieve if

it sought your darkest nightmare. Well written and full of black, gloomy imagery.

John Rosenman's piece, "A Little to the Left, and You'll Just About Have It," is the lighter side of the magazine. Rosenman manages to connect a shower head, childhood, mass confusion, and old age in an interesting romp of a tale that, though filled with enough laughs to keep the pace up, will still leave you with a few new insights. Thoroughly enjoyable.

"At the Christmas Bar-B-Que With Larisa and the Preacher Man," by Jeremy Lee, falls short of the promise of an interesting title. It is a story of rural American law-enforcement and spooky, psychotic preacher with a penchant for children. What he does with these children is never really elaborated on, and in the end, the tale meets the dead-end that too many horror stories meet. It has no resolution. Nothing is solved. Why the story of the preacher and this particular set of events is a better story than the preacher and any other is not touched upon, thus the strength is drained from a potentially interesting story.

Overall, the magazine is presented professionally, and the fiction is of extraordinary quality for a first issue, or even the first year. The artwork, while not remarkable, is consistent. **FANTASTIC WORLDS** is definitely a magazine to watch. Five of five tombstones.

FORBIDDEN TEXTS

(Continued from Page 49)

Tom Piccirilli starts things off in typically high gear with "Take It As It Comes," with its *noir* scenario of an abused wife on the lam with her lover. Tracking the pair to a roadside diner, her psycho husband kneecaps the lover and forces her rape by one of the patrons, a retarded farmer's son. The twist ending comes as a total, shocking surprise. The next story, by British horror master Ramsey Campbell, comes as a let-down. "The Body in the Window" takes a peek at sexual perversity in Amsterdam, but doesn't quite match the standard set by Campbell's previous exercises in erotic horror, such as the pieces in *Scared Stiff*.

Two stories—John B. Rosenman's "Hot Phosphor" and Brinke Stevens' "Jacking In," question the notion of cyberspace as the arena of safest sex. In Rosenman's story, a man turns the tables on a female stalker and discovers hitherto undreamt pleasures—by becoming the lethal Lothario of his cyber-

persona, "Rex Stud." Stevens' feminist cautionary tale, in which a nerdist software designer exerts his violent will on a high-tech sex toy called "Megabyte Meg," asks what would happen if a fantasy bit back.

Alexa de Monterice and Lucy Taylor also address the notion of role-reversals: the antithesis of de Monterice's story "Getting Wet" cruises bars in search of the man with the most adept tongue—period. The long-suffering wife of Taylor's "Male Call" experiences both the joys of "topping" and the hot flush of revenge against a brutal husband. While pretty standard territory for Taylor, it's tasty stuff nonetheless.

In Ed Lee and Gary Bowen's gleefully gross "Dead Girls in Love," the death of two sisters, high school seniors two-timed by the same alphamale paramour, resolves on a note of posthumous revenge, with just a jot of necrophilia and a hint of lesbian incest beyond the grave. Lee and Bowen should collaborate more often—their mutual itch for the perverse makes for some hilarious fiction.

Two of the antho's best contributions strike a spiritual note. In Brian Hodge's brilliant "Godflesh," a young bookstore clerk sated on fleshly extremes encounters a legless man who shows her the secret nexus of body and essence. The story's disturbing look at Eros as a gateway to transcendence should plant chills with the reader long after they've closed the book. Christa Faust's "Skin Deep" applies her scalpel-sharp, sardonic style to another descent into the erotic underground. In this one, a woman mourning lost love finds final release from her suffering, at the hands of a tattooed dancer she meets at a fetish club.

The remainder of the stories are all impressive, most notably Yvonne Navarro's "Impulse," about a chameleon-like *femme fatale*, and Graham Masterton's folkloric chronicle of the search for the deadly aphrodisiac that is "The Jajouka Penis-Beetle." *Stranger By Night* demonstrates that the *Hot Blood* books haven't lost their steam in any sense of the phrase. This collection doesn't disappoint.

VIRGIN

By Mary Elizabeth Murphy
Berkeley Books, 1996
\$6.50 US, \$8.50 Canada
Review by Herb Greenhouse

A COLLECTOR OF rare artifacts comes across a scroll. It is written on authentic parchment, and the ink used is mixed in a

way that ink has not been mixed in centuries. The text is a unique blend of Hebrew, Aramaic, and other ancient tongues. One problem: it is a forgery — a copy. Thus the "Glass" scroll came into the hands of one Father Dan Fitzpatrick, gifted to him by his longtime friend (the aforementioned collector). All in good fun.

Enter Sister Carrie. Sister Carrie makes the bread and soup at the kitchen for the homeless that Father Dan runs in New York City. Besides being loved by all who come to "Fishes and Loaves," Carrie is also Dan's lover — their secret. It is through this illicit relationship that Carrie discovers Dan's scroll, and the translation of it, and finds her destiny.

The Virgin Mary. Perfectly preserved, tucked away in a small cave in Israel waiting to be brought to light. A guardian sworn to protect her since the time of her death. A rich politician with a sick son and a penchant for prayer. A tough, Mexican bouncer.

Sound interesting? It is that, and more. Mary Elizabeth Murphy has woven an intriguing tale of ancient religion, modern faith, and international intrigue. Though there are points where the plot pushes the boundaries of one's ability to suspend disbelief, they do not drag horribly at the plot. After all, they happen because of a pre-ordained plan, and we are already conditioned to accept such "miracles" when it comes to Christianity.

Father Dan and Sister Carrie are very sympathetic, very "real" characters, and even Keesee, the Virgin's sworn guardian, member of an Israeli secret service — and much more — is not so difficult to relate to.

Overall, *Virgin* is a great read with a strong message. Though Murphy tends toward the preachy at the end, removing some of the power of the story itself, it is not enough to detract from the overall quality of the writing. Highly recommended. Four of five tombstones.

NIGHT SHAPES

by William F. Nolan
CD Publications, 1995

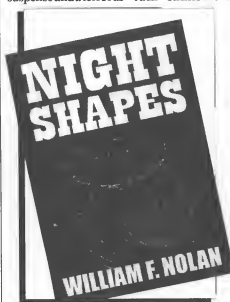
341 pp., Deluxe Limited Edition, \$50.00
Review by Faith L. Justice

NOLAN, A VETERAN author with roots in the midwest and Hollywood, provides a wide sampling of his skill in these twenty-four horror stories. Most dwell on themes of domestic violence and serial murder—usually as a result of child abuse. Transcending those themes is the feeling that this is a book

of experiments. Experiments in voice, point of view and subject — most of which succeed.

The most successful experiment in this collection is "The Cure." Nolan does a delightful job of building the complex character of a serial killer in a first person diary. The dichotomy of this man's self-perception as essentially moral, clashes with his matter-of-fact descriptions of the murders. He searches for a "cure" for the compulsion to strangle people and finds it in a most surprising place. This story is fun.

His other serial killer stories varied in quality. "Him, Her, Them" is a story of two serial killers who meet and date has a delightful twist ending. "A Final Stone" expands on the Jack the Ripper story. Nolan builds suspense and a terror as "Jack" strikes in the



small Arizona town where the original London Bridge was relocated. "The Visit," an extended experiment in story telling by dialog, tried for a twist ending but fell rather flat. "The Fancis File" is also flawed. It builds a picture of a serial killer as a victim — of child abuse, peers, societal rejection. The final occult victimization didn't work for me.

The other theme of domestic violence is reflected in a series of abusive father/daughter relationships. "Babe's Laughter" is a short but shocking tale exploring a woman's disintegration after the death of her father releases her from the need to be perfect. "My Name Is Dolly" is a chilling first person account of a child and her abusive adoptive father. Nolan excels in first person. We don't know if the narration is real or delusional brought on by the abuse suffered by the characters. "An Act of Violence" continues

the form in a series of fan letters to an unresponsive author — or are they?

Some less successful entries in this category include "On Harper's Road," a competent story about a woman who travels to her past to confront her parents. It suffers from a predictable Twilight Zone plot. "Trust Not A Man" explores the same territory as "Babe's Laughter" but is flawed by an ending right out of "The Little Shop of Horrors." "Boyfriend," an experiment in poor typing, seemed just plain silly.

Nolan's few stories tackling classic horror themes offers some comic relief. "Getting Dead" is a funny story about a vampire desperately trying to end his existence. He finds a California man who promises to fulfill his wish. He should have heeded the Chinese proverb "Be careful what you wish for..." "From A Narrow House" is a fun romp by a zombie who is still in love with his murdering wife. Maybe true love can conquer all.

Other random highlights of the collection include "The Party," an alcoholic's hell of endless schmucks, weirdoes and watered booze. It was chosen by Newsweek as one of the seven most effective horror stories of the century. "The Halloween Man" is a psychological horror story about a bright imaginative child who gives into her fears — or does she? "Special Treat" is about a lonely man, his divorced sister and talking cats. It has another twist ending that works.

Not all of Nolan's experiments work. There is a fair sprinkling of predictable stories that fall into the categories of "Don't go into the castle!" and "he was dead after all." But there are more hits than misses in this volume. Nolan's style is clean, his characters are vivid and complex, and his voice is one of experience. ♦

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Who's Who in DEATHREALM

Scott David Aniolowski has recently edited **RETURN TO LOVECRAFT COUNTRY**, an anthology of Cthulhu Mythos stories for Triad Press, and **CHAOSMUS MADE IN GOATSWOOD**, a very fine anthology of Mythos stories set in the fictional settings created by Ramsey Campbell. His poems in this issue are his first appearance in **DEATHREALM**.

Michael Apice lives in New York, and is breaking in big-time on the H/F/SF scene, with numerous contributions to **PIRATE WRITINGS**, **ABSOLUTE MAGNITUDE**, and in the previous issue of **DEATHREALM**.

Gary Braunbeck has been published previously in **DEATHREALM**, as well as in **ELDRITCH TALES**, **CEREMERY DANCE** and many others. He lives in Columbus, Ohio.

Donald R. Burleson contributes scholarly nonfiction regularly to publications like **CRYPT OF CTHULHU** and **LOVECRAFT STUDIES**. His fiction may be found in such magazines and anthos as **METAHORROR**, **100 WICKED WITCH STORIES**, **ELDRITCH TALES**, **TERMINAL FRIGHT** and others. *Jigsaw* is his second appearance in **DEATHREALM**. Dr. Burleson lives in Merrimack, NH, with his wife Mollie, who is an accomplished author as well.

Danielle D'Attilio, in addition to her work as **DEATHREALM**'s associate editor, is a prolific author of short fiction, with appearances in such markets as **100 WICKED LITTLE WITCH STORIES**, **TERMINAL FRIGHT**, and others. She lives in Greensboro, NC, with her husband and daughter.

Stacy Drumm is an illustrator from Stoutsville, OH. His work has recently begun to appear in a number of H/F/SF markets; his illustration for Donald Burleson's *Jigsaw* is his first appearance in **DEATHREALM**.

Herb Greenhouse is a native of Waynesboro, VA, and lives in a commune of musicians; the others play drums, guitar and piano, while Herb plays the radio. He lives in the basement of a house that is—yes—painted green.

Low Hartman is a pro artist living in St. Petersburg, FL, with his wife Kathy and

son John. Hartman first made ye editor's acquaintance at the University of Georgia in the late 70's, where much trouble resulted. His work may be seen adorning the art rooms of most H/F/SF cons these days, in **ABSOLUTE MAGNITUDE** and previous **DEATHREALMS**.

Alex S. Johnson has contributed articles to **A TASTE OF LATEX**, **CYBER-PSYCHO'S A.O.D.** and **BLOODSONGS**, among other publications. These pieces include interviews (he's chatted up sex trade workers and cult rock figures) book and movie reviews. Johnson lives in Los Angeles with his wife Karen.

Faith L. Justice is a New York resident, and yes, uses her real name for her byline. She has had stories, poems, and reviews in numerous small press markets, and is a founding member of a writer's group called CITH.

D. F. Lewis writes an awful lot. He lives in England, but you only have to reach as far as your bookshelf to find his brain.

Andrea Locke, of Charlotte, NC, has been **DEATHREALM**'s resident reviewer for several years, and has been a full time student at East Carolina University for way too long. Her recent projects include scripting for both the film and comic industries.

Ian McDowell lives in Greensboro, NC, and has had both artwork and fiction published in **DEATHREALM** previously. His short fiction may also be found in **ASIMOV'S MAGAZINE OF F & SF**, and many others. His first novel, **MORDRED'S CURSE**, is soon to appear from Avon Books.

Brian McNaughton, of Neptune, NJ made a name for himself writing porno novels back in the 60's, but has since reformed and made the step up to author of disgusting horror stories. His short fiction may be found in **DEATHREALM**, **TERMINAL FRIGHT**, **100 WICKED LITTLE WITCH STORIES**, and many others.

Wayne Miller is another Greensboro, NC resident, and made his first published appearance in the previous issue of **DEATHREALM**. He has been con-

tracted by Macabre, Inc., to provide the illustrations for Lois Tilton's upcoming short story collection.

Billie Sue "Killer" Mosiman writes mystery novels, horror stories, reviews, feature columns...you name it. It's been rumored that she was the mysterious shooter on the grassy knoll, but she has yet to confess to it. Billie Sue nowadays teaches a writing workshop on America Online. Her short fiction may be found in dozens of anthologies and magazines, including **SOUTH FROM MIDNIGHT**, **ROBERT BLOCH'S PSYCHOS**, **DEAD OF NIGHT**, **BLOOD MUSE** and many others.

William F. Nolan is well-known as author of the best-selling **LOGAN'S RUN**, as well as many, many other influential novels and short stories in the realm of F/SF. For a detailed look at his achievements, see the interview in this issue conducted by Gary Braunbeck.

Lucas Vancraven hails from the great state of Illinois. He inhabits a stone home near his family graveyard, where he spends his time listening to old Bauhaus albums, sipping Absinthe, and dreaming of deep, red...roses. His fiction and poetry have graced the pages of **THE TOME** (where he was the former poetry editor), **MIDNIGHT MOONS**, and **DEAD OF NIGHT Magazine**.

J.N. Williamson, of Indianapolis, IN, is a veteran author with 37 novels in print, his latest being **BLOODLINES**, published by Longmeadow Press. Among his 153 published short stories include tales in **NIGHT SCREAMS**, **HOT BLOOD 7**, **WHITE HOUSE HORRORS**, **HOLMES FOR CHRISTMAS**, and a major but as yet untitled Marilyn Monroe anthology.

Jim Zimmerman of MD, is a prolific fantasy illustrator, with appearances in such publications as **ADVENTURES OF SWORD & SORCERY**, **PIRATE WRITINGS** and previously in **DEATHREALM**.

Michael Zimmerman has sold short fiction to the likes of **SPLATTERPUNKS 2**, **GRUE**, **GOREZONE**, **INTO THE DARKNESS** and others. He lives in Dumont, NJ, with his wife, Elaine, and is a copywriter for the Berkley Publishing Group.